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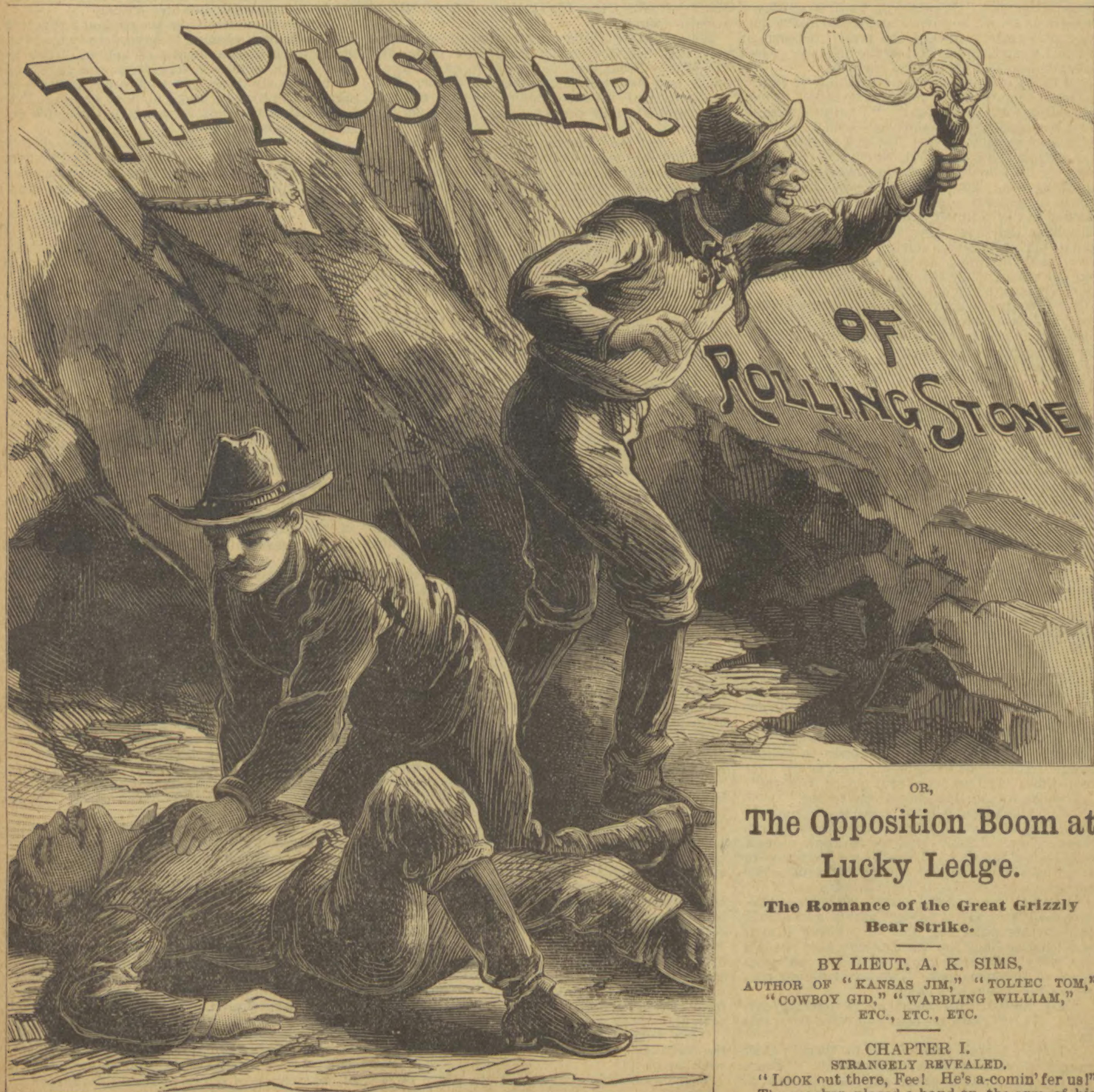
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OR,
**The Opposition Boom at
Lucky Ledge.**

**The Romance of the Great Grizzly
Bear Strike.**

BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS,
AUTHOR OF "KANSAS JIM," "TOLTEC TOM,"
"COWBOY GID," "WARBLING WILLIAM,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. STRANGELY REVEALED.

"LOOK out there, Fee! He's a-comin' fer us!"
The speaker placed a hand on the arm of his
companion and drew him hastily back. Before
them was a clump of bushes near the margin of

A FEVER OF EXCITEMENT GREW ON HIM AS HE CONTINUED HIS CLOSE SCRUTINY. THE
BEAR'S CAVE WAS LITERALLY SEAMED AND STARRED WITH GOLD.

The Rustler of Rolling Stone.

a stream, and from out of these bushes a large grizzly bear had made a sudden and startling appearance. The bear was growling savagely; and, strange to say, there were flecks of bloody foam on his ponderous jaws. For a moment he stood hesitating, swaying his huge head slowly from side to side as if uncertain whether to risk an attack or beat a retreat. A growl deeper and more menacing than any that had preceded it called forth the exclamation.

Felix Redmond, the man addressed as Fee, and universally known as Red Fee, dropped a hand to his pistol, undetermined what course to pursue. To accept the grizzly's gauge of battle, armed as they were only with revolvers, seemed suicidal. A lucky shot might terminate the affair in their favor; but an unlucky one might so arouse the brute's ire that their lives would pay the forfeit. Neither of the men were cowards, but they knew enough of the habits of "Old Eph" to understand the peril they were in and to act with caution.

Red Fee's companion drew still further back, almost dragging Fee with him.

"Twon't do to try bullets!" he nervously assumed. "If the critter's willin' to go its way, I'm willin' to go mine."

Bruin evidently reconsidered his determination to fight, induced thereto no doubt by the retreat of the men. Showing his teeth in another cavernous growl, he turned about and made his way deliberately toward the river, increasing his gait to an ambling trot as the distance grew between him and his natural enemies.

"I thought it was fight, fer a minute er two," taking a deep breath of relief, as he looked at the retreating form of the bear. "I hain't a-splilin' fer a row under sich conditions—not I!"

This companion of Red Fee was seemingly a tool rather than an equal, which was indicated more by his bearing toward his superior than by anything else. They resembled each other very much in general outward appearance, being clothed in the ordinary garb of western miners, of which the most conspicuous article is the inevitable red flannel shirt. There was, however, one difference. Red Fee was "bearded like the pard," while the other, whose name was Curt Thomas, had a smoothly-shaven face.

Red Fee paid no heed to his companion's words. He was looking earnestly at the clump of bushes from which the bear had emerged, and a questioning light shone in his eyes.

"What in Sam Hill is a grizzly doin' that near to town?" he queried. "Answer me that, will ye?"

He glanced across the brow of the hill and over the rising ground to where, but a few hundred yards away, a group of rough shanties was visible. They represented the new mining camp of Lucky Ledge—a camp which Red Fee had been instrumental in ushering into existence. It was the newest of the new camps in that region; so new in fact that its builders and promoters had not had time to familiarize themselves with the peculiarities of the surrounding country.

"Lookin' fer somebody to grub-stake him, mebbe?" and Curt Thomas laughed at his own joke.

"A queer place fer a bear to come out of!" Red Fee continued, not heeding Thomas's words. "Shouldn't think a grizzly would hide in a bunch of brush like that."

He stepped forward for the purpose of investigating. The bear had disappeared from sight, and, they felt reasonably sure, would not return.

"You got a good look at the beast?" to Thomas, who had obediently fallen in behind him. "There was blood on his jaws, er my eyes fooled me. Tell me what that meant, will ye?"

Thomas was inclined to nervous levity.

"I low he's been a-eatin' up some o' them raw Eytalians what you brought over yesterday frum Sunset City. I don't think they'd know enough to git out o' his way. There'll be a dead bear in these hills if he has, fer there's dirt and garlic enough on one o' em to p'izen an elephant!"

They had reached the screen of bushes. Before them they saw a passage like a game-trail. Still further enlarging this by pressing into it and bending back the obstructions, they made a discovery that drew from them low exclamations of astonishment. The bushy clump concealed the mouth of a cave!

They halted, with words of wondering surprise. It was plain the bear had come from this cave.

"Mebbe there's another 'n' in there!" Curt suggested, voicing the thought of both. "Bears an' Injuns an' rattlesnakes air li'ble to hunt in couples!"

"I intend to see what's back there," Red Fee

decided, impelled by intense curiosity. "If there's another bear in there, likely the two have been at it, tooth and nail, and that'll account for the blood we saw."

He pushed the bushes still further aside, drew his big revolver, and made a cautious advance, Curt crowding close at his heels.

The opening was not so large but that they had to stoop in passing through it. Just beyond the entrance they were forced to stop. The darkness was becoming so intense they could see only a few feet.

"Go out into the bushes and see if you can rustle something for a torch," was Red Fee's command; and Thomas hastened away to obey.

He was back in a few moments with two or three bunches of light wood that promised to answer their purpose. A match was touched to one of these, and by its flickering glare they continued their explorations.

They had not gone a dozen feet when the flickering light revealed a pair of objects that seemed surprisingly out of place in that gloomy hole. One was a man lying face upward on the hard floor. The other was a bit of writing supported in the cleft of a stick, which was planted in a fissure of the rock near him. To all appearances the man was dead. His face was so blood-covered that the features were indistinguishable, the blood having flown from a scalp-wound.

Here, then, was the explanation of the mystery that had so piqued Red Fee's curiosity. The bloody flecks seen on the jaws of the bear could now be reasonably accounted for. The unknown had invaded Bruin's den, a combat had resulted, and the bear had achieved the mastery.

But, what was the meaning of the piece of paper upheld by the cleft stick?

Red Fee glanced at it even more keenly than he did at the prostrate figure on the floor, then went to it and read it by the light of the flaming torch.

It was a mining-claim notice, filled out in regular form, and signed with the name of Philip Craigen. There could be little doubt it had been placed there by the man who was now seemingly lying dead at their feet, the victim of the big grizzly.

Red Fee flashed his torch upon the surrounding walls, looking at them with eyes that blazed with cupidity. Then he bent over the stranger.

"The chap ain't dead!" he declared, placing a hand over the feebly beating heart, and at the same time making a minute inspection of the scalp-wound.

Curt Thomas was looking on with an interest the most intense.

"He ain't dead," Fee repeated. "That's a bad scratch there, and he may git well, and he may not!"

There was a strange quaver in his speech, which did not pass unnoticed by Thomas.

He got up very deliberately, and again scanned the walls by the light of the smoking and flashing torch. A most unpleasant look had come to his face, a look which one unacquainted with the man would not have found easy to interpret. It indicated conscienceless avarice, if not murder.

He uttered a hoarse ejaculation as gleaming points in the wall caught his trained vision. The notice had revealed to him that the cave had been staked as a mining-claim by this man, Philip Craigen, and he was searching for some evidences of its value.

He had known many claims to be taken which were not worth the trouble of the legal formalities, and he was not sure this might not be one of them. But, when he caught those points of light, and quickly followed the discovery by a careful examination, he knew that Philip Craigen had not erred. He had seen rich ore, but he did not remember to have seen any that promised to yield more of the precious metal to the ton than did this.

A fever of excitement grew on him as he continued his close scrutiny. The bear's cave was literally seamed and starred with gold. He perceived that almost within touch of his hands was a fortune, such a one as he had for years dreamed of acquiring. He turned from the walls and looked into the eyes of his comrade. He saw mirrored there the desire that had overmastered him. Curt Thomas had always been his pliant tool, and would not fail him now.

"It's worth a big risk," he said, glancing at the form of Craigen before speaking. "Air you with me in it?"

There was in his eyes almost the glare of insanity.

Thomas nodded. These two understood each

other, and there was no need for words. Words were dangerous things, to be used sparingly at such a time.

"What will we do with him?" again looking at Craigen.

Thomas wrinkled his brows in a fiendish scowl.

"He's as good as dead al'ready! Why not clip him on the head, and then chuck him into the drink?"

"Is there any need?" cautiously, as if desirous of feeling the ground well before him. "He'll pass over the divide before morning anyway, don't you think? No use in sticking our heads into a noose if we don't have to."

"Twould be safest!" was the cold-blooded comment. "He might come out o' that, and it'd be easy enough to fix 'im so that he never would. Jist a quiet rap on the head, then toss 'im into the river. If he's found, no one could know 'twas done, and there's the marks of the grizzly's claws to tell their own tale!"

The rascal really seemed anxious for his superior's permission to carry this into effect.

"No," Red Fee averred, drawing back, as if he already beheld the hangman's noose dangling before his face. "We're goin' to have this mine"—the glitter of avarice in his eyes—"and we needn't run the risk of hanging to git it. The feller's sure to die, and hurryin' will only bring about his end a few minutes sooner."

He took the notice from the stick and thrust it into his pocket, seeming to have already made up his mind as to his course of action. Then he drew out a notebook, tore from it a page, and scribbled a similarly worded document, which he signed with his own and Thomas's names. This he placed in the cleft from which Craigen's notice had been taken.

He surveyed his work with a cunning sort of satisfaction, lighted another torch—for the first was burnt out—and giving it to Thomas, burried from the place to inspect the surrounding landscape.

Night was near at hand, and a few lights already shone from the windows of Lucky Ledge. The fear of discovery made him nervous, but there was nothing in what he saw and heard to add to the feeling. The river foamed and raved only a few yards away, the rocks and hills were silent, touched by the ineffable glory of the fading sun.

The beauty of the scene passed unheeded. He was only anxious to ascertain if the way was clear for the consummation of his plan; and having satisfied himself on this point, he turned back into the cave.

A half-hour later, when the gloom of night was falling, he and Thomas emerged from the bushes, bearing between them the unconscious form of Philip Craigen. This they deposited by the riverside at a point where it would not be readily discovered; and then stole guiltily away toward the town. They had taken the precaution to place the injured man near the bear-tracks visible in the sand, and doubted not that when the body was found, the cause of death would be attributed to the grizzly.

On the following morning they expected to herald their great "find" to the world.

CHAPTER II.

THE MASQUERADE.

FROM one of the principal buildings of Lucky Ledge came the fantastic caperings of a pair of violins, accompanied by the sounds of dancing. More than a month had elapsed since the occurrence of the events just noted, and in that time Lucky Ledge had grown and prospered, until now it called itself a city. It must be remembered, however, that it does not take much to make a city in the ruder portions of the West. A dozen shanties and a general store are sufficient. There have even been "cities" whose only existence was on paper.

The music of the violins came from the upper part of the building. The lower part was occupied as a saloon and gambling resort known as the Moss Agate.

The ball which was in progress was a masquerade given by Felix Redmond and Curt Thomas in honor of the opening of their new mine, the Grizzly Bear.

Their plan for the disposition of the body of Philip Craigen had not worked to their entire satisfaction. Nevertheless, its success was such as to warrant them in continuing in possession of the property. On the morning which followed the discovery of the mine, they had duly announced their find to the wondering men of the camp. This was, of course succeeded by a general rush to that point, and an examination of the richness of the ore. But to the surprise of the plotters, the body of Craigen was not found by the river's brink.

They immediately began a surreptitious search for it, but could discover it nowhere, nor learn what had become of it. The fact filled them with apprehension. But the belief grew in their minds that Craigen had regained sufficient strength to walk, and had insanely wandered into the hills where he had perished. There seemed no other natural conclusion, and they took courage.

The development of the mine was at once commenced. The cover of bushes was removed from the entrance, the opening enlarged, and a roadway built to the town.

The active work of mining was to begin now, and in honor of that event the ball was given.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the room above the Moss Agate was thronged almost to the point of suffocation. It was not a large room, and could barely accommodate those who desired to participate in or witness the dancing. The fact that it was a masquerade greatly added to its attractiveness. In so small a place every man knew his neighbor, and there was much curiosity manifested as to who the various maskers might be.

There were so few women in Lucky Ledge that the presence of a representative of the gentler sex provoked much notice and comment. She was habited as a shepherd maid, and a crimson mask concealed her features. She had danced frequently with an athletic Mephistopheles, and was now conversing with him in low tones. The surmise that she might be Red Fee's daughter was dissipated by the actions and words of Red Fee himself.

"She ain't my daughter, ner she ain't my cook," he said, speaking to a crowd of cronies, "an' I'm hanged if I know who she is! I'm goin' to ask her to dance with me after a little, and then I'll try to find out."

Red Fee was got up in a most gorgeous manner for a man of his customary negligence. He even wore a white shirt and a Prince Albert coat, justifying this lavishness by the observation that the opening of the Grizzly Bear Mine was an event of no ordinary moment. He had had his beard trimmed, too, and thus metamorphosed was not a bad-looking man. Curt Thomas was similarly arrayed, but Curt was uneasy and awkward in this new gear.

Mephistopheles was still talking to the shepherd maid when Red Fee crossed the room, and bowing low before her, requested the privilege and honor of the next dance.

The girl laughed lightly behind the mask, bringing an unwonted flush to Red Fee's swart cheeks. There was something in the laugh that seemed to indicate that the girl was sneering at him. But her words reassured him and caused his heart to bound, for he had feared a refusal.

The voice was low and pleasant; in truth, almost too low. Apparently there was an effort at repression. Red Fee listened intently to the tones, hoping to thereby discover the girl's identity. The voice was a strange one. He was sure he had not heard it in Lucky Ledge. If that were true, where had this charming creature come from? She had not dropped from the clouds, and women were not so plentiful that she could have entered the town without notice. She had appeared in the room above the Moss Agate, coming from no one knew where.

Red Fee turned his gaze on Mephistopheles, wondering whose was the face and form there hidden. Did he know who this man was, he might know who was the shepherd maid. It was like questioning the sphinx. Though masked, Red Fee was known to every one in the room, as was Thomas and a number of others. They could not lose themselves in a fancied character. But these two—Mephistopheles and the girl—had so acted their parts that guesses were wild and useless.

"I'd like to git a look behind that," Fee observed, as he led her forth.

"You shall, by and by!" was the murmured answer. "When the time for unmasking comes! Just now, I am the Shepherd Maid; nothing more, nothing less."

Red Fee bent over her to catch every word. He was inclined to be gallant to ladies, and the circumstances surrounding this woman increased this natural tendency. He could not but fancy that the face hidden behind the crimson cloth was beautiful. Yes, and young! There was a willowy grace in the girl's movements that could suggest no other conclusion. It had been a long time since Fee had danced thus with a young and handsome woman and because of this—and possibly because of the mystery—his admiration assumed proportions to threaten his peace of mind.

Fee was not an easy dancer, though he was a

Chesterfield compared with Curt Thomas; and in his boisterous bouncings, a large wallet slipped from his hip-pocket and fell unnoticed by him to the floor. A man standing near glanced quickly around to make sure that he was unobserved, then drew the wallet toward him with his foot and secured it. He felt certain there was money in it.

Three times did Red Fee crave the hand of the shepherd maid in a dance, and three times did he whirl through the giddy mazes. Gradually the belief was growing on him that this was not a girl at all, but a man disguised as such, possibly one of his intimate associates. A feeling of shame-facedness came with this, for he had allowed himself to utter certain foolish and meaningless nothings which, in that event, would cause him to become the laughing-stock of the camp. Thinking of this, he became so uncomfortably hot that the Prince Albert seemed to incase him like a band of heated metal; and he grew doubly anxious for the denouement.

The unmasking came at last; and he saw before him, not the associate he feared, neither the beauty his first fancies had pictured; but a healthy, rosy face, rather coarsely lined and somewhat unsymmetrical, but a pleasant face for all that. It was an unknown face, too. It had never been seen in Lucky Ledge.

"Your name?" he questioned, unmasking at the same time, and fumbling for his wallet to get the card he had prepared for the occasion.

He stopped as if petrified, and as if in a dream heard the girl give her name as Rose Latham. The wallet was not there, and the swift suspicion came to him that this woman had stolen it. She had had ample chance to do so. He grew white and red by turns, hesitating what to do. Should he accuse her openly? She who had played so upon his heartstring?

Before he could decide, she had bowed laughingly to him and retreated through the swirling throng. A sudden jam kept him from following her; and when he did, he could not find her.

Mephistopheles, too, was gone!

"Curse the minx!" he ruefully muttered. "I wouldn't have had her to git that pocketbook fer a good deal. There's more than money in it to me!"

CHAPTER III.

IN THE ASSAYER'S WORKSHOP.

THE glow of a low fire of an assayer's furnace shone dimly on the faces of two men. The scene was an assayer's shop on the outskirts of Lucky Ledge. Over the door of the shop was the name, QUINTIUS QUARTZ, painted in big letters; which were now, however, almost indistinguishable by reason of the gloom of night.

The taller of the two men was the assayer. He had an earnest, manly face. It was beardless, and seemed uncommonly pale, looking almost ghastly white at times beneath the light of the fire.

They were conversing in low tones.

Could Red Fee have peered into the shop at that moment, he would have been treated to a genuine surprise, for the face of the younger man bore a striking resemblance to that of the mysterious shepherd maid!

The assayer was holding in his hand a tiny "button" of gold ore, and this he exhibited as he talked.

"Just look at that, Tom," and he passed the "button" to the other. "There's richness for you! There isn't a mine in the country that will go as much of the pure stuff to the ton as will this Grizzly Bear Mine, as they call it."

"And to think, Phil, that you have lost it!"

"Lost it!" with an impatient gesture. "There's where you are mistaken, brother mine! I haven't lost it; nor do I intend to! They hold the winning hand now, but the game hasn't been played out, by a long shot!"

The tones were intensely earnest and bitter.

"I suppose you know what they are accusing you of?" pocketing the "button" and drawing forth the wallet which Red Fee had lost at the masquerade. "They say you stole this from Fee the other night when you were dancing with him. Of course that is a mistake. I don't know who took it, but I found it this morning in some sage-brush near the Moss Agate. It had been rifled and thrown there. But, there was a very interesting bit of paper in it. Interesting to me, anyway."

He opened the wallet and produced a folded sheet, which, when he had spread out, proved to be the notice that Red Fee and Curt Thomas had found in the cave, and which they had replaced with their own.

The younger man's curiosity seemed greatly aroused at sight of this.

"And they accuse me of taking his wallet?" he questioned. "Not me?"

"No; the bewitching creature who danced so frequently with this claimant of the mine. What was the name? Oh, yes: Rose Latham!"

He laughed significantly as he bent over the paper.

"Strange how this notice should get back into my hands in so singular a manner!"

"The wrong might have been righted at that time, if I had only known!" the young man mournfully asserted.

To make clear the meaning of this fragment of conversation, it will be necessary to return to Philip Craigen, who was left by the river-side in a supposed dying condition by Red Fee and Thomas.

His injuries, while severe, were not so serious as they hoped and believed. Still, they might have proved fatal, had not help arrived. It came, a few hours later, in the person of the young man who was now conversing with him, and whom he had called Tom. This was Tom Craigen, his brother. Both had left Sunset City two days before, Tom some hours after Philip.

Philip was a professional assayer, and something of a Western boomer. He believed there might be abundant work, as well as abundant money at the new diggings of Lucky Ledge. At any rate, he could obtain employment as an assayer of the new ores being there brought to the surface.

The trail into the cave had attracted his notice, and being of a venturesome disposition, he had prepared a torch and gone in to see what he might discover. His eyes had quickly revealed the value of the ore seams in the walls of rock. It was plain they were yet unclaimed. It was a rich and almost unequalled find. He could not but marvel at his good fortune in thus stumbling on it. It heralded wealth and all that the term implies.

With trembling fingers, fearful lest he should be seen and thwarted before the deed was done, he wrote the notice and set it up in a split stick. Then, almost dazed by the riches surrounding him, he continued his explorations, his mind filled with wonderful fancies.

This preoccupation had a serious result. He stumbled unwittingly on the grizzly that had been peacefully sleeping in one of the side passages. The brute was angered by the intrusion, and charged him viciously. He attempted to beat a retreat, tripped and fell near the notice, and was stricken senseless and clawed by the bear.

He knew nothing until hours afterward. Then he found himself by the river, with his brother bending over him and dashing water into his face. His brother was not alone. Accompanying him was a man of hunter-like mien, a stranger to Philip Craigen, and, until a few moments before, equally a stranger to Tom Craigen.

The hunter had been endeavoring to restore Philip Craigen to consciousness, when Tom arrived on the scene. Of his good intentions there could be no doubt, and young Craigen was truly grateful to him for his services.

"Kealed over by a bear!" was the sententious comment, pointing to the marks of the grizzly's blow. "Come nigh doin' him up, too, but he's wu'th a dozen dead men yit. If I had him to my cabin, I could nuss him up an' make him as good as new, in a little while."

Philip Craigen looked up, recognized his brother, even in the faint moonlight, smiled, endeavored to speak, and then relapsed into unconsciousness.

As for Tom Craigen, it is doubtful if he would have known his brother, had it not been for the familiar garments. So blood-covered was the face of the wounded man that it was wholly unrecognizable.

After some discussion, it was agreed that the best thing that could be done was to convey Philip to the hunter's cabin, a couple of miles distant in the hills. The Craigens had no acquaintances in Lucky Ledge, and this offer of the hunter was a godsend.

The old man's skill in treating injuries of this character was considerable, and within less than two weeks, he had Philip on his feet; and though the latter was still weak, his wounds had healed, and he felt himself again able to battle with the world.

Long before that time, however, news had come to them of the claiming of the mine by Red Fee and Curt Thomas. Philip had acquainted his brother and the hunter with his discovery, and a visit made by the hunter to the town had revealed the true status of the case. An investigation set on foot by the old man had brought to light the truth concerning the nature

of the alleged discovery of the mine by these new claimants.

"You'll have to fight 'em," was his declaration. "They'll never give up anything 'ceptin' it's by force. You can count on me to back ye."

He had some money, and this he pressed on Philip when the latter felt strong enough to begin the battle, which he proposed to make for his own. The mine was his. Of that there could not be the shadow of a doubt. Yet he could not establish it, nor prove his title in any court. The work of the usurpers had been cleverly done. His notice had been removed, and theirs placed in its stead, and there were no witnesses to testify in his favor. Certainly, his unsupported word would go for naught. If he regained the mine, it must be in an indirect manner, and by stratagem, rather than by force or legal means.

He did not wish to take the money; but when it was urged on him he resolved to make the best possible use of it. A portion of it had gone toward the erection of the shop in which the two young men now were, and as a purchase price of an assayer's outfit.

At Philip's advice, and in accordance with the line of conduct he had mapped out, his brother did not show himself in the town for some days. His first appearance was at the masquerade in the guise of the shepherd maid. The Mephistopheles of the same night was Philip himself.

"Yes, the wrong might have been righted, then," Philip agreed. "But, you did what seemed best. You couldn't know anything about my discovery."

This was a point they had touched on many times, Tom always bewailing his ill-luck. If he had but known of the mine, and of the changed notices, he could have set up another notice for Philip, and remained there to guard and enforce his brother's title. But, he had not known, and so had gone away, leaving Red Fee and Thomas to consummate their scheme. And since then he had not been able to do any thing. The subject was fraught with bitter memories.

"The button shows that the thing is worth working for," and Philip again read the notice he had taken from the wallet. "I wonder what I can do with this thing? I can't make it serve as evidence, for it would be very easy to claim that I wrote it as an afterthought."

"And I wonder what they will do if they find Rose Latham?"

"Hang her!" relaxing the rigid lines of face and looking smilingly at the questioner. "It might be, though, that Fee might want to marry her. A thief loves a thief."

He was becoming thoughtful again.

"That suggests an idea:—It will be just the thing to help me out when I start this opposition boom. I have been thinking of some other lines for you, but this is by far the best. Red Fee wants a type-writer operator. I saw his ad. in the Sunset City papers of yesterday. Apply for the position. That will let you into his secrets, more or less, and be the biggest thing in the universe for me when the tug comes."

He smiled again, looking into his brother's face.

"You don't comprehend! My word for it, if Miss Rose Latham applies for the position, she will get it!"

"You don't really mean it?" drawing back in a startled way.

"My dear Tom, nothing less. It's the greatest idea, yet. As his private secretary, you will know the ins and outs of his whole business; and if I don't knock the boom out of Lucky Ledge, I'll be ready to believe that bear scraped away some of my brains when he swiped me."

"But this charge of stealing?"

Philip Craigen looked at the paper again, slowly folded it up, and stowed it away in one of his pockets.

"I don't know how you're to work that. I suppose he old fool really thinks you took it. You'll have to rely on your wit—and your beauty. A handsome woman, my dear Tom, is a power—in a mining-camp. If you'd say the word—I mean if Rose Latham would say the word—half the men in Lucky Ledge would be ready to chaw Red Fee up for suggesting such a thing. Why, it's been so long since they've seen anything better than a greasy squaw, that even a Rose Latham could set them wild!"

Tom Craigen was flushing like a school-girl under his brother's words, a thing extremely pleasing to Philip.

"Just blush that way, Tom, and simper a little, and trail your perfumed skirts as daintily as you know how over the floor of his office, and the old sinner will be ready to fall down and

worship you. He'll forget that he ever lost a wallet, or ever thought of you as the thief. Will you do it?"

Tom twisted his heel contemplatively into the soft pine of the floor, screwing out a little trace of sawdust. He was silent for fully a minute.

Then he said very deliberately and very emphatically:

"I will!"

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED CALLER.

RED FEE sat in his room—a little office he had had fitted up at his residence—and scowled uneasily at the floor and out through the window that commanded a view of the town. He was ill at ease, and had been stewing and fuming all morning. In truth, he had given himself little rest since the hour he had discovered the loss of his wallet. The loss of the money it had held was a comparatively small matter; though, just then, when his expenses were heavy to the breaking point, he needed every cent he coul'd get.

It was not of the money he was thinking, however, but of the slip of paper which the wallet had contained.

"I need a guardian!" he growled, rising and striding restlessly up and down the room, with his hands thrust deep into his trowsers pockets. "Twas the biggest fool trick I ever done. An idiot ought to a' knowd better than to hang onto a thing like that! Why didn't I stick it into the blaze of the torch?"

He had been making a quiet search for the missing paper, and had bad Curt Thomas engaged in like manner. He feared to mention his loss to any one. No good could come of it, and it might arouse dangerous distrust.

What puzzled and worried him most was that the mysterious shepherd maid could nowhere be found. So far as was known, not a person in Lucky Ledge had ever set eyes on her since her disappearance from the Moss Agate. This was a strange and, to Red Fee, an ominous circumstance. Could it be possible, he asked himself, that she had known of the contents of the wallet and extracted it from his pocket for a purpose?

But what could she do with it? Claim notices were not uncommon things, Philip Craigen was not known in Lucky Ledge, and the description of the metes and bounds of the mineral veins in the cave were not specific enough to be dangerous.

Still, a feeling of vague uneasiness haunted Red Fee. The shadow of impending peril seemed to hang above him, and this feeling he could not shake off.

In his search for Rose Latham, he had time and again asked himself what he would do should he find her. The memory of her feminine graces and witchery lay yet fresh on his mind and heart. He was a susceptible man; and he had been striving to nerve himself for the necessary sternness.

"Confound the women, anyhow! They always git a feller into trouble. I never knowed it to fail. There's my wallet gone, my money gone, and that paper gone. The idee of her a-lookin' as rosy and temptin' as ripe persimmons, and a-talkin' as sweet as custard-pie, and at the same time a-liftin' of my pocket-book! It jist goes ahead of anything! I'll know not to be so precious trustful another time!"

He started and changed color. In his pre-occupation of mind he had been speaking aloud; and a knock on the door warned him that some one stood on the threshold of the office. That some one might have overheard him.

He did not wish to be disturbed, and his face showed his annoyance, as he turned the knob to ascertain who the caller might be.

His hat came off with marvelous celerity and he endeavored to coax a smile to his face, when he saw that his visitor was a female. The smile gave way to a look of surprise. Before him stood the object of his thoughts, Rose Latham.

She was not habited as the shepherd maid, but was becomingly attired in clothing of some dark material.

"Come in, come in," he said, retreating quickly and placing a chair for her.

Her sudden appearance gave him an un-wonted flutter, and he could not conceal his astonishment.

She accepted his invitation, and as soon as seated produced a copy of the Sunset City Sirocco, and pointed to his advertisement therein.

"I notice here that you want a private secretary, some one to take charge of your correspondence and books, and I have come to apply for the position."

She went straight to the point with business-like accuracy, though smiling sweetly and speaking in low tones.

"Yes! Ah! Ahem!" rubbing his hands together to hide his confusion.

The proposition was more astounding than even the visit.

"Yes; I put that ad. in the paper; but I was a—er—a-thinkin' about a gentleman in that connection."

He hesitated, at a loss for words.

"You have—er—had some experience, Miss—Miss Latham? The ad. mentions a typewriter, you see! I want my correspondence done up in ship-shape—A No. 1 style—you understand. It has a big effect on business. These hyer moneyed galoots back East will pay a good deal more attention to a letter if it's got up just right with a typewriter. It looks more like business. I aim to have a lot of letter-heads printed, with 'Lucky Ledge' and the date line in some kind of scroll work er other; and I'll put my letters on that. It'll fetch 'em! They won't know but that Lucky Ledge is a second Leadville fer boom!"

Having got his "wind," he was rattling on, trying to gain time to study the situation, size up his visitor, and determine what to do. Doubts of the correctness of his previous surmises began to trouble him. Surely, this charming creature was not a thief. But if not, who took the wallet?"

"I think I can satisfy you," she averred, as soon as given a chance to reply. "I am familiar with business forms, and know how to operate a typewriter."

"It would take the jack-pot!" Red Fee thought, looking earnestly at her. "To have a handsome creature like that a-sashayin' around in this hyer old office! Gee whillikins!"

He did not venture to put these thoughts into words. Instead, he asked:

"When could you go to work, miss?"

"To-day, if you wish."

Red Fee ran his fingers through his hair. He was delighted and bewildered, though undecided. He could not drive from his mind all thought of the theft. If this young woman was inclined to steal, would it be safe to give her the run of the office? She would necessarily be intrusted with more or less money.

"I ain't got the machine yit from Sunset City," talking again for delay. "Ner I ain't got them ginger-bread letter-heads I was a-speakin' in' of."

"I am very anxious for the place," she said, with an appealing glance that quite melted Red Fee's heart and hustled his doubts into the background.

"I might find some work fer ye right away," looking at her admiringly and earnestly. "Where might ye be a-stayin', Miss Latham?"

She cast down her eyes.

"If you please—" hesitatingly, "I should rather not answer that question. If I can get work, I shall stop at the hotel over there. If not, I must leave the town."

He mentally resolved that she should not leave the town.

"Needn't answer, if you don't like," shifting uneasily. "I had no business a-askin' you. You can git work right in this shop, and as fer the hotel, the hotel bo hanged! If you're a-mind to, and can put up with sich as we've got, you can stop in this house. My daughter'll be only too glad of your company."

Rose Latham murmured her thanks, sinking her voice so low that Red Fee had to guess at part of the words.

He was rapidly becoming enraptured with her charms, though he realized he was making a most egregious fool of himself. But for the life of him he could not at that time have done otherwise.

"May I go to work to-morrow?" she questioned, not giving him a chance to retreat. "I am very anxious to begin as soon as possible."

"To-morrow it is," he said. "I'm agreeable. I'll send for the machine and the other things to-night, an', until they come I 'low I can find plenty fer you to do."

He was about to request the privilege of summoning his daughter that he might introduce her to this new employe, but Miss Latham prevented him by rising and retreating toward the door.

"I prefer to go to the hotel for to-day. To-morrow I will be ready for work. And, Mr. Redmond, you can't know how I thank you, and what a weight you have taken from my heart."

With these words, and a rare smile, she was gone.

She had scarcely vanished, when Curt Thomas pushed the door open and peered in. He fol-

lowed this by advancing into the room and closing the door after him.

Red Fee knew that Thomas had seen the girl, and he grew flushed and hot in consequence.

"Why didn't you send for some one an' have her nabbed?" was Thomas's anxious query. "It ain't too late, yet."

He placed a hand on the door-knob as if meditating doing it himself.

"Set down!" commanded Fee, growing still redder.

"But she'll git away!" Thomas urged. "I've been watchin' fer her straight along, an' that's the fust time I've seen 'er. Where did she come from?"

"Hanged if I know!"

Thomas was about to dart from the room in spite of the command.

"Set down, I say! I don't want that girl tatched. I've hired her!"

The other was dumfounded.

"You heerd what I said?" I've hired her! She come in answer to my ad. fer a secretary, an' I took her in."

"Well, may I be switched!"

Thomas slid into a chair, inert and helpless. He had no words with which to meet the statement. He could only stare his amazement.

"What's wrong about that?" trying to assume a brazen attitude to conceal his shame-facedness.

"A thief! The thief you was a-huntin' fer!"

As he said it, a look of craftiness overspread his features.

"That was only guess-work on our part!" determined to ride Thomas down and force him to adopt this new opinion. "You don't think me a fool, Curt!"

Thomas maintained a discreet silence. His thoughts might not bear utterance.

"Ye see it's this way, Curt," brightening as a new idea came to him. "The way things stand, now, we couldn't prove she took that wallet, even if we arrested her. If she stays hyer, I can mighty soon find out if she's a thief. That's why I took her."

A humorous twinkle was showing in Thomas's eyes.

"I low I can see as fur through a mill-stone as the next man, if there's a big enough hole in it!" and the corners of his mouth twitched in a grin. "All I've got to say is that if you don't watch her, she'll steal the house over your head, jist as she's stole yer heart!"

It was a parting and center shot; and having delivered it, he swung the door open and bolted into the street, anxious to see what had become of the young woman who had already gained such an ascendancy over his chum and partner.

CHAPTER V.

A GHOSTLY APPEARANCE.

"My God! what's that?"

Red Fee had gone into his new mine to look after some details of work. Very little had been done as yet, only enough to show the richness of the veins and anticipate their development.

It was night; extremely dark without, and pitchy black within. Red Fee carried a miner's lantern to light him on his way, and this fell from his hand to the flinty floor, as he uttered the exclamation.

What he saw was enough to chill the blood in the veins of the sanest. Twenty yards away was another man—or apparition in the shape of a man—Fee was not sure which, though he inclined to the latter supposition.

He had heard a tinkling, clinking sound. Supposing it to be the pick of some belated miner, he had not given it much heed, but had hurried on his way. He had stopped agast, on turning one of the shoulders of rock. At almost the point where he and Curt Thomas had found Philip Craigen was apparently Craigen himself. The general resemblance was remarkable; even the face was clotted and gory as Craigen's had been.

Red Fee reeled as if about to fall in a swoon, but gathered his staggering energies and drew himself erect.

The horrible thing, plainly revealed by the light of the half-overturned lantern, was staring at him in a blood-chilling way with eyes that seemed fixed. There was a grotesque expansion of the crimsoned lips as if some rending cry was to be hurled at him.

Red Fee was sufficiently courageous on all ordinary occasions, but he was accustomed to contend with creatures of flesh and blood instead of specters from the grave. But for the similarity in look, he might not have thought of Craigen in this connection. True, he had never seen Craigen's face, it having been completely masked by its bloody covering; yet he felt that before him was the very face, the very form that he and

Thomas had borne to the river-side, a few weeks previous.

Could the dead come to life, or their spirits revisit the scenes of earth? He had always scoffed at the idea. He had never cared to think much of what might lie beyond the boundary of this existence. Here was ocular demonstration that the dead might and did return. Otherwise, he was dreaming or the victim of a hallucination. He had never been given to anything of the kind.

He forced himself to pick up the lantern as a measure of reassurance. As he did it, the uncanny thing moved toward him with a slow and gliding motion.

Red Fee gave a quick cry in which was commingled horror, doubt and indecision. But, he as quickly recovered, and drawing his revolver fired at the moving figure. Not once, only, but twice and thrice.

The echoes reverberated and rolled, like the discharges of artillery, yet the specter stood in the selfsame place, unmoved and undisturbed.

There seemed even a smile on the horrid red lips, a smile of derision and accusation.

This was too much for Fee's nerves. He threw down the revolver and the lantern, and with a cry of terror bounded through the darkness toward the entrance. And after him came a chilling and unearthly wail, repeated and multiplied by the echoes of the cave until it seemed that all the demons of inferno were voicing a chorus to frighten him. There was a low nattering of feet, too, which was similarly multiplied by the echoes; and with a yell frozen on his lips, Red Fee reached the opening and dashed out into the starless night.

He ran like one bereft of his senses, not stopping until he pitched headlong over a boulder, where he lay panting and bruised, and almost afraid to rise.

"Great Jupiter!" he gasped, as his courage began to slightly return. "What could that have been, anyhow?"

He glanced back toward the mine, but could see nothing. Neither could he hear anything, though for fully ten minutes he lay there straining his ears for the slightest sounds.

He got up on his hands and knees and surveyed his surroundings over the top of the boulder. He was near the river's edge, and had he continued on in that mad race, whould have run plumb into it.

He was already shivering like a leaf, and now the cold perspiration broke out on him. To have fallen into that torrent in the darkness might have meant death. His mind was in so chaotic a state, that the gurgling of the leaping waters, as he now turned his attention to it, seemed like echoes of the eerie howl that had so startled him.

He scarcely knew how long he crouched there behind the boulder. He did not want to remain there, but he was not yet brave enough to risk venturing from this place of concealment.

"If Curt was only here," was his longing thought.

He counted Curt among the bravest of the brave; and even began to fancy how he and Thomas would return to the cave and pump lead at the thing that had frightened him.

This brought with it the uncomfortable reflection that he had three times fired at the ghost without result. What would Thomas's bravery avail in a contest with a creature like that, a creature that was surely not flesh and blood.

The sweat stood in cold, damp drops on his face, when he finally crawled from his hiding-place and made his way fearfully toward the town. He was so weak he could scarcely drag one foot after the other; but he reached home finally, and pulled himself wearily into the office.

"Egad!" he cried, pouring out a glass of fiery liquor and swallowing it almost at a gulp. "That goes ahead of my time! I wonder what Thomas will say to that?"

CHAPTER VI.

FACE TO FACE.

He dropped into a chair, with the glass and the liquor-bottle near at hand, and endeavored to speculate on the occurrence that had so startled him. He could make nothing of it, though his courage began to come back to him as he drank of the potent contents of the bottle. He grew so brave after a time, that he earnestly desired the coming of Thomas, for the purpose of going with him to the cave.

Nevertheless, when there came a sharp and distinct rap on the door, he started and shivered, and exhibited as much nervous trepidation as if the ghost had suddenly appeared at his elbow.

Not until the rap was repeated did he venture to get up and see who was there.

It was Quartz, the assayer, who advanced into the room, without giving Fee a chance to invite him.

Quartz was not one of Fee's favorites, but any one promised to be better company than his own thoughts, and so he cordially welcomed him, at the same time filling the glass.

Quartz gave his head a negative shake.

"I never drink," he declared, pushing back the liquor. "I don't think it's a good idea for a man who has any business to attend to; and even one who hasn't, would no doubt be better off without it."

"As you like," retorted Red Fee, draining the glass himself, for his tingling nerves still felt the need of a bracer. "It's a little raw out tonight, and this warms a feller."

He shivered and glanced hastily about the room.

"The reason I mentioned business is because that is what brought me here," and the assayer drew a folded paper from the inner pocket of his coat.

There was something so familiar in the look of the paper that Red Fee could not repress a start.

"If I'm not mistaken, you've seen this before," unfolding the sheet and holding it up for Fee's inspection.

The latter shrank into the depths of his chair, as if desirous of hiding himself; but no word of confession passed his lips, though Quintius Quartz looked at him scrutinizingly.

Red Fee recognized the paper, but he had no intention of saying so. It was the notice he had taken from the cleft stick, and which had disappeared with the wallet. A multitude of suggestions crowded his half-fuddled mind.

"You don't think you ever saw it?" drawing it out that the writing might be more easily read. "You might be able to make some me think so, Mr. Redmond, but not me. You have seen this more than once, and know a good deal more about it than you care to say."

"What air you a-drivin' at?" Red Fee growled, burrowing still deeper into the depths of the chair and working his head down into the collar of his coat, like a tortoise withdrawing into its shell. "Hanged if I ketch on! Lemme see the thing."

"You can see it very well from where you sit! You might take a notion to rip it into ribbons. I think it's safer in my hands. If you wish, I'll read it to you."

"I don't see that it's anything but some feller's claim notice. They're as thick round hyer as the leaves."

"Then you can read!" refolding the paper and thrusting it into the pocket. "We'll retire it from exhibition, and see if we can get down to business."

Red Fee was troubled by a sense of uneasiness. He fancied some demand was to be made on him, though he knew nothing of its character. The thought that this Quintius Quartz was the thief who had taken the wallet was also uppermost in his mind. Then the girl was innocent! There had likewise come to him a suspicion, born since the showing of the paper, that this very man might be the ghost! Evidently the assayer had an interest in the mine, or he would not be there now for the purpose of bargaining and haggling.

But the old rogue was resolved to do nothing to implicate himself, and so held his peace, permitting the assayer to continue.

"As you saw, it's the claim notice of Philip Craigen. That's the name signed to it. Now, I happen to know that this man Craigen is not dead. More than that: he has commissioned me to see you concerning his title to the Grizzly Bear Mine, for he claims it as his."

Fee turned a shade paler in spite of the liquor flush on his naturally red face.

"Mebbe you know what you're a-drivin' at, though I'll be hanged if I do!"

"A bit of history may aid you," Quintius blandly asserted. "This man, Craigen, whose name is attached to the notice, stumbled on the cavern which holds the Grizzly Bear Mine, as he was coming to Lucky Ledge some weeks ago. He saw the richness of the ore veins, and put up the notice as the first step toward holding them. He was attacked by a bear, and left for dead. You found him, you and Curt Thomas; substituted a notice for his; and carried him out to the river, thinking he would die. But he didn't. He is still alive; and has sent me to tell you that he intends to make a fight for the mine."

"Bosh!"

Red Fee was visibly trembling; but he gave as much force to this sneering exclamation as he

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could. He could not doubt that by some means the assayer had come into possession of the truth. He was too bewildered and fear-stricken to mentally inquire how this had been done. He resolved, however, to defy his accuser and deny everything.

"An interesting piece of history, is it not?" and Quartz smiled sarcastically. "I thought you would have something to say about it!"

"It's all bosh!" Red Fee reiterated, mustering all his courage. "Me an' Curt Thomas found that mine, an' there was no underhanded game about it. We had a fight with a grizzly which we found in there, an' that's why we named it the Grizzly Bear. You've jist got your facts a little tangled. Tell yer friend Craigen that, will ye? I ain't the honor of the gentleman's acquaintance; but if he's a man o' sense, he ought to know that he's a-makin' a fool o' himself, an' you, too, by sendin' sich a message. Give him that, will ye, with my compliments! an' say to him that when he gits the Grizzly Bear by retailin' sich yarns, I hope he'll send me word about it."

Mr. Quartz was firm and stern, seeming more determined than ever.

"You are not ready for a compromise, then, though you know these things are true?"

"I can't see that there's anything to compromise," with some show of warmth. "If there was, I might talk. We hold the Grizzly Bear fair and above board; and we mean to hold it so long as the veins show color."

There was a ring of defiance and of confidence in this, though he could not help shuddering a little, whenever the vision of the ghost interposed, which it did almost constantly.

"Better think it over a little," the assayer urged. "I am gathering proof of these things, and the time is not far distant when I shall use it. It isn't wise for you to be too hasty, Redmond. I offer you a compromise, now; after awhile, nothing of the kind will be considered."

Red Fee's answer was as before.

"You will do nothing?"

"Not a thing!" he thundered. "An' I sha'n't thank ye fer comin' hyer ag'in with this nonsense!"

"Very well, then!" rising to depart. "If you prefer war, it shall be war to the knife!"

CHAPTER VII.

A SURPRISING INCIDENT.

THE smoldering fire in the assayer's furnace again threw its uncertain and fitful light on the two men whom we first saw there—Philip Craigen and his brother Tom.

It was the night following Philip's visit to Red Fee, made as Quintius Quartz.

Quintius was reasonably sure that Redmond had no suspicion he was Craigen. He had watched Redmond closely, and believed that such a suspicion would have revealed itself in the man's manner. This was as he wished it to be; for he was not ready yet to throw off the mask and confront Red Fee in his true person.

Tom had assumed a partial disguise. It consisted only of a mustache; but this so altered his appearance, especially his appearance in the character of Rose Latham, that there seemed small danger of his identity being revealed. In addition, they were quite alone, and the light from the fire was of the poorest.

Tom was laughing softly at some observation made by Quintius.

"The old gent is badly rattled," he said, seemingly taking up the thread of their conversation. "Your visit to him upset him. He knows now that his secret is shared by others, and the fear of the result will give him no rest."

"He was rattled last night, but it did not incline him to a compromise."

"Probably he thought that the big end of the division would fall on your side of the line. He has had me writing letters all day to various parties offering the mine for sale."

"What is his price for it?"

"Fifty thousand dollars!"

"Whew! He holds it big, anyway. But it's worth it, every cent and I'm not sure but twice over. The veins are extremely rich. Of course, there's no knowing how far they extend, or how soon the really valuable ore may play out, but I think there's more than fifty thousand dollars in there. Why, there's half that in sight now!"

"Almost the exact words he used to me this morning. And he made the same statement, or nearly the same, in the letters he dictated. Only he raised your estimate a little. He claimed the Grizzly Bear to be worth a hundred and fifty thousand, and laid great stress on the low price at which he was offering it."

"What excuse did he make for placing it on the market?"

"His great need of money, and his inability to work it properly."

The assayer was silent and thoughtful for a few moments.

"I presume he wanted these parties to come out and look at it right away?" he questioned.

"Yes; or send reliable agents to investigate the matter."

"Getting you in there as his secretary was a master-stroke," Quintius commented, meditatively nursing his chin. "It will enable us to keep up with all his little games."

He laughed lightly, and looked quizzically at his brother.

They had been speaking in cautious tones, scarcely raising their voices above a whisper. Carefulness in this respect was with them one of the cardinal virtues.

"It's really a funny piece of business. I suppose you feel that, even more than I can, when you are seated with him in his office, and he thinks you the admirable creature you pretend to be!"

Tom echoed the low laugh.

"It's funnier than that," he declared. "A dozen times funnier! I thought I should break down this morning and reveal everything. Why, would you believe it? the old fool is actually in love with me. He couldn't keep from saying as much!"

"Must have been the effect of the liquor he took last night!" Quintius observed, dryly. "He was soaking himself in good shape when I called on him."

"And he's kept up the soaking process all day. It'll take the profits of the Grizzly Bear to pay his liquor bill, if he continues as he's begun. I suppose that's what made him such a fool! 'When the wine is in, the wit is out,' and 'there's no fool like an old fool!'"

"It's all the better for us," smilingly. "He'll not be so likely to give you your walking-papers, and a genuine case of love will blind him to a good many things. I presume you discouraged him in a very dignified manner?"

"Didn't I, though!" chuckling at the recollection. "'Sir!' I said, as icily as the north pole, and then I petrified him—froze him to his chair, as it were—with one of my chilliest glances. Ha! ha! you ought to have seen him eat humble pie!"

Quintius joined in the laugh; then observed, gravely:

"That offer of the mine for fifty thousand worries me a little. Some capitalist, or syndicate may snap it up at that. The property's dirt cheap at the figure. We'll have to make some move to block the sale, if it seems likely one is to take place. If the mine gets into other hands, it will mean a harder fight for us to get it."

Tom grasped his brother by the shoulder in a warning way, and looked upward. A suspicious sound had attracted him.

The next moment, the flimsy ceiling gave way above their heads, and a man dropped unexpectedly to the floor beside them. He came down, spread out like a bat, and struck with a thump that seemed to indicate broken bones as a result."

The brothers were surprised beyond measure at this unwelcome intrusion. But, they did not lose their heads. Quintius was the first to act. He sprung upon the man, before the latter could recover from the shock of the fall. Tom leaped to his aid, both of them proving more than a match for the assailant.

Nevertheless, the man did not surrender without a struggle. He fought and kicked viciously, and exerted all his strength to hurl the brothers from him and make his escape.

"Get me that rope in the corner!" Quintius commanded. "We'll tie him first, and look at him afterward. I've got him where I can hold him!"

Tom obeyed; and then proceeded to bind the spy, whom Quintius was holding down.

That he was a spy, and had concealed himself in the garret to hear what they might say, neither doubted. How much he had heard, they could only surmise.

When the fellow had been secured, Quintius arose, thrust a pine splinter into the embers, and held it so that the light might fall in the man's face.

This revealed his identity and called from him a string of curses.

He was Curt Thomas!

Before this had been done, Tom had taken the precaution to retreat to a shadowed corner where his face could not be plainly seen. This man might already know who he was, but it was best to take no risks.

"What does this mean?" Quintius fiercely demanded.

He was answered by another volley of oaths.

"Speak up!" he commanded, with angry emphasis. "What were you doing up there?"

Thomas had no ready reply.

"Unless you can answer satisfactorily, I shall have to file a complaint against you, on the charge of burglary."

"I reckon I must 'a' crawled up there when I was too drunk to know what I was a-doin'," endeavoring to smooth the matter over as well as he could. "That's you, is it, Mr. Quartz? Blamed if I knewed ye. If you'll take these ropes off'n me, I'll go peaceably about my business."

"Who told you to come here spying on me?"

Thomas loudly denied that he had been spying, insisting that he had crawled up there while drunk, not knowing where he was, or what he was doing.

A ladder led from the lower part of the shop to the garret, and Quartz frequently departed from the place for a few minutes, leaving the door open.

"Who you got back there with ye?" Thomas asked, lifting his head and attempting to look in the corner where Tom had taken refuge.

"I don't know that it's any of your affair!" was the sharp reply. "It's enough for you to know that it's a friend of mine."

The assayer had been doing some rapid thinking. He saw that nothing was to be got out of Curt Thomas, and he did not care to proceed against him legally. To retain him there as a prisoner seemed useless.

"You may go," he said, casting off the rope; "but if I ever see you around here again, you may rest sure you will not get off so easily."

He threw open the door and pointed to the street; and Thomas, glad to escape, fled.

"What do you think of it?" Quintius asked of his brother, when the door had been closed and locked.

"That he was here for a purpose. It must have been connected with the mine, or my work for Red Fee. Can it be that I am suspected, and that he followed me from the house?"

"He came here before either of us," was the positive reply. "Otherwise he could not have got in. He didn't follow you! I think he was spying on me, for his own and Red Fee's benefit, because of my visit and claims last night. What he heard, though, I've no idea. If it was anything of value to them, we'll know of it full soon."

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVE'S ENTANGLEMENTS.

TOM CRAIGEN had not overstated the case in speaking of Red Fee's infatuation.

By day and by night Fee thought of his comely typewriter, to the detriment of the many business interests he had in hand. His dreams were about equally divided between her and visions of the ghost.

This constant dwelling on the charms of Miss Rose Latham promised to interfere sadly with the "boom" he was trying to inaugurate in Lucky Ledge. He had achieved in the past something of a reputation in the boom line, which he was now seemingly bent on wrecking. To be successful as a "boomer" requires incessant activity, combined with alertness, skill, and a daring that approaches audacity. Red Fee had all these, but just now he was not making good use of them. Too many things were distracting him. The fears engendered by the ghost, the liquor he was drinking to dull those fears, and above all, the foolish attachment for the pretender who was acting as his secretary.

His drinking did not make him kindly disposed toward any of the inmates of the house, except Rose Latham. He treated her with marked subservience. But not so with Louise Norton, his step-daughter, and Betty Butterball, the servant. He was inclined to be especially abusive to Louise, a handsome girl of eighteen or nineteen, and the daughter of his dead wife.

Two or three days after the unexpected tumble of Curt Thomas into the assayer's shop, Tom Craigen, coming early to the office in the guise of Rose Latham, found Louise shedding tears bitterly, as she put the office to rights.

There was one thing Tom Craigen had not told his brother, and that was of the violent fancy he had conceived for this girl. Probably he felt a little ashamed of it, for there was a certain ludicrousness about it in connection with the disguise he had assumed.

Louise knew not that Rose Latham was a man, having been as completely deceived on that point as bad Red Fee.

"Why, what is the matter?" the typewriter asked, looking at the girl in bewilderment.

"Nothing," replied Louise, throwing the hair back out of her eyes.

"Then why are you crying?"

Louise threw down the duster and gave way to a fresh burst of grief.

"Oh, Miss Latham, you don't know how father abuses me! He has been cursing me again this morning, and for nothing at all."

Miss Latham had removed her outer wrap, and was now seated.

"Cursing you!" in tones the most kindly and compassionate.

"Yes; and it was about you!" and with a gulping of sobs she threw herself into the typewriter's lap and buried her face in her hands.

It was an uncomfortable situation for Tom Craigen. A red spot flamed in each cheek, and his heart gave a queer flutter.

"It was about you," Louise continued, her slight form shaking with the violence of her emotions. "Father says I'm not respectful enough to you. I'm sure, Miss Latham, I desire to be!"

A great temptation to take her in his arms and soothe her into quiet came to Tom. He could scarcely resist it. But he did, and said gently, as he passed his fingers through her hair:

"I couldn't wish you to be more so. I am sorry your father has got such a foolish crotchet into his head. If you like, I'll speak to him about it."

"Oh, no! No!" looking up affrightedly. "Please don't!"

"I won't, then. But why should he think such a thing?"

Tom's face was as red as fire, almost; and now it was Louise's turn to flush painfully.

"Oh, I thought you must know!"

She stopped and hesitated, fearing she had already gone too far.

"I don't know," she was assured by Miss Latham. "I can't imagine. What was it?"

Louise flushed and laughed, a laugh which drove away the tears and made her face radiant.

"Why, papa means to marry you if he can!"

"Does he say so?"

Tom was perspiring most uncomfortably, and mopping his face to get rid of the streaming moisture and conceal his confusion. If Miss Norton had not been blind as a mule, or too ingenuous herself to suspect such a bit of playacting, she must have had her distrust aroused by Tom's all too evident distress. It may be, though, she attributed it to the surprising nature of her communications.

"He didn't say so in that many words, but that's what he meant. But you mustn't tell him!" lifting a finger in good-natured chiding. "He isn't really my father, you know. You can marry him if you like; and, although it might be pleasanter for me if you did, I shouldn't advise it. You don't know him as well as I do. Now, I am going. Good-by!"

She imprinted a kiss on the typewriter's face, picked up the duster and fled, leaving Tom in a most distressed condition.

He was not given time, however, to think much on what had occurred, for at that moment he saw Red Fee coming toward him along the little corridor leading to the back yard. Miss Latbam knew from the look on Fee's face that he had beheld the last scene in the little drama which had just been enacted.

Red Fee was smiling broadly, and seemed pleased with what he had witnessed.

"Gittin' on good terms with Louise, I see!" he asserted, coming into the office and drawing the door to after him. "That's right! That's right! I'm glad to notice it. Louise is a good girl, though she does rile me once in a while like a rattlesnake. I sha'n't quarrel with you fer kissin' her!"

The sentence was finished with looks instead of words, and said quite plainly: "If it had been me you had kissed in place of Louise, I should have been pleased!"

Tom Craigen could not hide his confusion. His face was still as red as fire, and the perspiration continued to stream from it in a way that did not add to his womanly beauty. But Red Fee did not give any heed to this, possibly because he had been drinking heavily again that morning.

The liquor had emboldened him once more, and obliterated the bitterness of yesterday's rebuff.

"Wouldn't you like to become the mother of so handsome a young woman as tha'?" said the boomer, winking coarsely. "I hain't so old nor so bad-looking but what you might go further and fare wuss. It would be a big b'ist, too, in a wordly way. I've already got a goodly store o' ducats, and that Grizzly Bear Mine will make me the richest man in these parts."

Rose Latham's perturbation was rapidly pass-

ing away, now that the original occasion of it had left the room. She felt able to hold her own with Felix Redmond, even if she was not able to do so with Louise.

"You forget yourself again, sir!" she declared, stilling her agitation with an effort and speaking as coldly as possible. "I came here to render you a certain service, not to be insulted by such proposals. If you have no other use for me than to tender me an offer of marriage, I am ready to go!"

Red Fee became immediately subservient and fawning.

"I was only jokin'!" he cried. "Jist a-jokin'! You flash up like gunpowder. Where's them letters I was lookin' at yesterday? I'm ready to answer 'em now."

She had partially risen as if to get her wraps, but this change of demeanor stayed her.

The situation was so ridiculous that Tom Craigen could not repress a broad smile, in spite of his utmost endeavors to do so; and this being taken by Red Fee as a flag of truce, peace and harmony once more reigned.

CHAPTER IX.

A ROLLING STONE THAT GATHERS NO MOSS.
EVENTS of an interesting character began soon to tread on each other's heels.

In the first place, gossip of a kind most disadvantageous to the interests of Red Fee commenced to circulate in that mysterious manner characteristic of ill-news, and which baffles description. It was reported secretly that murder most foul had been committed in the Grizzly Bear Mine, and that the ghost of the slain man nightly haunted the scene of his untimely taking off.

This had a bad effect at the outset, just at the time when Red Fee was trying to push operations in the mine and open it up, that he might the easier sell it. A night shift of miners had been set to work, but they threw down their tools and incontinently struck before two nights had passed by. They had seen the ghost, so it was said and reported it to be the ghost of a miner—being led to this conclusion by certain low, clinking sounds which they had heard. These sounds could only be explained by attributing them to the agency of the spook.

Miners are apt to be a superstitious class, and these were not an exception. The scare spread to the day men, and only two or three of these were courageous enough to venture into the mine, even when the sun was shining brightly without.

Red Fee was in despair. Certain memories made him almost as much afraid of the ghost as was the most ignorant miner. Cold chills chased each other up and down his back whenever he thought of the mine and its dread occupant. Nevertheless, he was resolved that something must be done. In some manner the ghost must be laid, or he would be a ruined man.

"Hang it all!" conversing with Curt Thomas on the subject. "I don't think I ever saw such a lot o' right-down cowards as this town holds. The idee o' the hull blamed camp bein' scared to death at a shadder!"

"Shadders don't clink on stones like some one a-handlin' a miner's pick," Thomas dubiously averred. "I hain't seen the thing, an' I ain't a-wantin' to; but I heerd its music. That was enough fer me!"

Red Fee was disgusted and disappointed. He had hoped to be able to induce Thomas to enter the mine and lie in wait for the ghost. He saw he would have to make an advance on that proposition.

"You ought to be too sensible, Curt, to be afraid of a thing like that. I'm not afraid of it; and to show you that I'm not, I'm willin' to go with you to the mine to-night an' lay fer the thing with pistols."

Curt shook his head.

"Nary!" was his sententious comment. "Excuse me!"

"If we don't git red o' the thing in some way, the mine hain't wuth shucks!" Red Fee urged. "I had it as good as sold, last week, an' fer fifty thousand. To-day we couldn't get five thousand; an' if this thing keeps up, in another month we can't give the mine away. I shouldn't mind it, if we could go on with the work. But we can't. The men air that scared, they're crazy. I don't believe that some of them would go in there fer a half-interest."

"I don't blame 'em," Curt muttered. "What good'd a half-interest do 'em if the thing should put its fingers on 'em?"

"Bah! You're the worst one in the lot!" and Red Fee could not conceal his displeasure. "Thomas, I took you fer a man of sense, and you're showin' yourself to be a plum idiot!"

Thomas accepted the reproach without a murmur, possibly thinking it was better to be a live idiot than a dead hero.

He went away shortly; and Red Fee commenced preparations for a trip to the mine. To support his courage he took a long pull at the bottle on the table, and then sat down to think over the situation. Only the realization that he was being brought to the verge of ruin could have induced him to contemplate a visit to the place. He had no real belief in spirits, and this greatly aided him; but what he had already seen had shaken and unnerved him. In his moments of cooler deliberation he was sure the uncanny thing was only a man masquerading in that grim and horrible manner. But this reflection lost its bolstering force whenever he came face to face with it.

"It must be Quintius Quartz a-playin' that trick," he asserted, as he had so often asserted before. "Of course, it ain't no ghost. It's a man, an' he's got a reason fer doin' of it. Now, who'd be so likely as Quintius? He wants the mine, and has set out to git it. If he can't do that, he's determined that he'll ruin me, anyway."

He did not leave the house until near the hour of midnight, the time when the ghost was accustomed to disport itself. He took with him his big revolver and a heavy knife, but no lantern, reasoning that if the ghost was a man, he could the more readily approach it in the darkness.

All was quiet as he neared the mine. Only the swash and moan of the river could be heard. These sounds added to the loneliness of the place; and Red Fee stopped, shudderingly, as he drew near the entrance.

His courage was already oozing; but he screwed it once more to the sticking-place, and ventured into the black mouth of the mine. He crept forward in a crouching posture, moving with the greatest caution. A pebble turned under his foot, and he started as if a rifle had been fired at him.

The interior was gloom itself. No noise, no ray of light. There was no indication that any being, spirit or otherwise, ever came there.

Red Fee knew that it lacked only a few minutes of twelve. The watch in his pocket ticked so loudly he felt sure it would discover him, should any one draw near.

Suddenly, and without premonition, a low clinking as of iron striking against stone reached him; and at the same moment a light blazed forth from the darkness; and within the circle of its rays stood the mysterious being who was personating the original claimant of the mine.

Red Fee could scarcely repress a low cry of horror. There was the same bloody face that had so terrified him before.

A slight sense of reassurance came to him, however, when he saw that the light which revealed the form was produced by a lantern. Surely, no spirit from another world would need so material a thing.

With the thought, Red Fee drew his revolver and fired it as rapidly as he could. The echoes were appalling. The light went out; whether shot out or extinguished by the ghost he did not know. No sound came to tell him whether or not his aim had been effective. With the disappearance of the light the specter vanished; and Red Fee lay back, panting and exhausted, an uncontrollable panic taking possession of him.

"I believe I got him, that time!" he whispered and then crept from the place, trembling and shaking like a victim of ague.

No dead man was found there in the morning; and the circumstances taken altogether so shook Red Fee that he could not help detailing them the next day to Rose Latham. From thence they reached the ears of Quintius Quartz.

Quintius had been as much puzzled as any one by these ghostly manifestations in the Grizzly Bear Mine, and had given much thought to the matter; but could hit on no theory that promised a solution.

As the reader has seen, Red Fee was inclined to lay these appearances at the assayer's door. But in this Red Fee was mistaken. Quintius Quartz knew no more about the matter than did Fee himself. In fact, not so much. Fee had seen the ghost, and he had not; all his information reaching him at second-hand.

But Quintius had other things to think about, just then, and so paid little heed to the matter. He had started a rival town across the canyon, more than a mile away, and he was bending all his energies to its upbuilding. This town was to be the club with which he purposed to break his enemy's head. He had called it Rolling Stone, in defiance of the old adage

which says that "a rolling stone gathers no moss."

The name came as a part of the accident which induced the commencement of the town. Quintius was a prospector of no mean skill; and in looking over the slopes of the opposite mountain for indications of the precious metals, his foot had dislodged a stone which went tumbling into the valley. Beneath that stone was the "sign" his straining eyes longed to see.

Within a few days some rich veins were located; after which Quintius Quartz made a hasty trip to the East, and succeeded in inducing some capitalists to join with him in his enterprise.

From that moment dated a boom which had no parallel in the Red Mountain district. Red Fee was distracted, and his cunning hand paralyzed by fear and the effects of drink. The shadows of the horrid shape that haunted the Grizzly Bear Mine hung over the camp of Lucky Ledge, preventing all progress; and its rival, Rolling Stone, speedily caught up with and passed it in the race for supremacy.

"I'll do him up, yet!" was Quartz's exultant exclamation, as he met his brother one night in the shop for consultation. "Rolling Stone's on the boom, while Lucky Ledge is standing still, if it is not going backward. If that ghost will just keep up his antics awhile longer, I'll crowd Red Fee to the wall and buy Grizzly Bear mine in for a song. That's what I'm striving for. He robbed me of it as deliberately and mercilessly as does the highwayman who slugs a traveler! Then, I'll be in a shape to pay back the old hunter with big interest, and to make things square with all those who have befriended me."

It was a triumphant and perhaps a boastful prophecy; but the facts just then seemed to justify it.

CHAPTER X.

THE BATTLE OF THE BOOMERS.

A "RUSTLER," in Western parlance, more frequently means a man of enterprise and energy than it does anything else. As applied to cattle-thieves, it is a term of opprobrium. Applied to a man of business tact and daring, it is to a great extent a designation of honor. In this latter sense, it was very likely suggested by the rustling sound which the stiff breeze makes in passing over the prairie grass; and when used in reference to a man, indicated that he moved about with a breezy celerity prophetic of success.

If ever any one deserved the title of rustler, according to this view, it was Quintius Quartz. In his efforts for the advancement of his new town he was energetic and tireless. No grass was allowed to grow under his feet. Whatever he undertook he did thoroughly and quickly.

Red Fee turned his attention from the doings of the ghost long enough to recognize the fact that Lucky Ledge was being outstripped by its new rival. The Grizzly Bear was not the only mine in and about that camp, though it was by far the most promising. He had only a partial interest in any of these, while he and Thomas were sole owners of the Grizzly Bear. But the latter could not be worked now, and he resolved to turn his attention to the development of these, in an effort to head off the growth of Rolling Stone.

By stretching his credit to the utmost limit, and mortgaging these mines, he brought on machinery, and introduced the latest processes for crushing the rock and extracting the ore. Under the impetus of the money thus thrown into circulation, Lucky Ledge took a quick, upward spurt, and for a time seemed destined to regain its old position.

This energetic movement on Red Fee's part called for a similar advance by the assayer, and it soon became a battle between the boomers. Both towns might have succeeded in a quiet way, had their leading spirits been willing. But Quintius Quartz was determined on the financial ruin of the man who had so foully robbed him, and Red Fee was equally determined not to be beaten.

Both were handicapped by a lack of funds. Quartz had practically nothing when he came into the valley, and Red Fee little more than hope and brilliant prospects.

Not to be outdone, the assayer sent for a well-known railway official with whom he had an acquaintance, and after showing him over the camp at Rolling Stone, he invited the official into his office for the talk he had hinted at in his letter.

"You see what we've got here," said Quartz, plunging at once into the subject. "There is plenty of ore here, and it's rich. The trouble is

it costs too much to get provisions and machinery in and out of this valley. It takes the big end of the profits."

He did not tell the official how badly he was in debt, and how sorely he needed money. That would have been a confession of weakness which he did not desire to make.

He had strained his credit to the utmost limit, and felt that something must be done now, or all his carefully-worked plans would yet result in failure.

Of one thing, however, he had made sure. He had returned to the bunter the amount of his loan, with generous interest. Should ruin come, this debt had at least been paid; and he could secure his other creditors by transferring to them all of the Rolling Stone property. He did not intend to fail, though, if energy and hard work could prevent it.

The official inclined his head, but did not commit himself.

"If a line of railway could be run from Sunset City to Rolling Stone," Quartz earnestly continued, "it would mean the saving of this immense outlay, and assure the success of the camp."

"It would cost a great deal," the official observed, surveying the carpetless floor. "To be frank with you, Mr. Quartz, I don't think our line could afford it. It wouldn't pay. There's too much rough country to be crossed."

"It could be done, though?" questioningly.

"Yes; it could be done. The only trouble is, it wouldn't pay."

"That's what I've been wanting to get at!" Quartz exclaimed, earnestly. "We made an estimate of the value of these mines awhile ago. My brother and I and three others own them, my interest being the largest. They are already mortgaged, but not to anything like their true value. See here!"

He drew out some account books and proceeded to explain to the official the amount of indebtedness resting on each mine, and on the works and buildings. The record of the assays, with computations of the probable wealth of various veins, were also discussed. The interest of the official, which had already been awakened, was sensibly quickened.

"If you will run a spur of your railway into this town, I'll transfer to you three-fourths of all the shares I have in the mine and property of Rolling Stone."

The man looked at him earnestly, seeming half inclined to doubt that Quartz meant it.

"It would not leave you much!" he observed.

"Enough to let me out, with some to spare."

Quartz did not then tell him of the great richness he believed to lie in the heart of the Grizzly Bear Mine, nor of his claims and hopes in that direction.

"There is one proviso," he continued. "There must be an agreement in the contract that for one year the end of the track, after it has reached here, shall not be pushed further."

There was an uplifting of the official's eyebrows.

"You know, of course, of the rivalry existing between the towns. If Rolling Stone is made the end of track for one year, it will kill Lucky Ledge as dead as a herring."

"They could freight from here; and would have a boom of their own, when the road reached them."

"I understand that. But it would practically cause the removal of their town to this place. The tide might, and probably would, flow back at the end of the year; but in the mean time I should be able to accomplish my purpose."

"Which is?"

The assayer regarded him closely.

"I believe you are a man who can keep a secret. Felix Redmond stole from me the Grizzly Bear Mine, and I am resolved to get it back. If Lucky Ledge took a downward tumble, values will decrease; and Redmond—who is already mortgaged for more than he can ever pay—will be forced to sell; and then will come my time."

"But if the Grizzly Bear is mortgaged?"

"Which it isn't, and won't be. He's tried it time and again; but it has such a reputation that no one will advance a cent on it."

"I'll look into the matter," the official promised, rising, "and let you know to-night."

He was back again shortly after nightfall, having spent almost the entire day in looking over the two towns. His face told Quintius Quartz that the proposition would be accepted.

Before they could arrange the details, a smell of smoke was wafted to them; and while they were speculating as to its probable cause, they heard a low cry and the sounds of a struggle.

They rushed out into the street to discover flames leaping from the principal building of

the place—a building so situated that, if burned, the fire would almost certainly communicate to other houses. The erection of those buildings had strained the assayer's slender resources, and their destruction at this time meant ruin. It was no wonder, then, that his face whitened, and a cry escaped his lips.

There was a sort of dance or fandango in progress in a shanty a few hundred yards distant, where were gathered all the men of the place; and the fire-bug (Quintius could not doubt that the fire was of incendiary origin) had taken advantage of this to accomplish his villainous work.

Clear and sharp rang out the assayer's cry of "fire!"

The sound of the scuffle still came, and he raced with the railway official in that direction.

The combat was taking place within the lee of the building, and almost within reach of the flames. To Quartz's intense astonishment, the antagonists were his brother Tom and Red Fee.

The latter saw them coming, wrenched himself from Tom, and leaped away into the darkness, vainly hoping his identity was still unrevealed.

"That man set fire to the house!" Tom exclaimed, springing up in great excitement. "Don't let him get away!"

The official had not recognized Red Fee, not being familiar with his features; but he darted in instant pursuit, a chase which proved fruitless.

The alarm of fire had reached the men at the fandango, and these were now racing down the street.

"How did you happen here?" Quintius inquired of his brother, his curiosity at that moment stronger than any other feeling.

The explanation was quickly forthcoming.

Red Fee had in some manner, gained an inkling of the object of the official's visit to Lucky Ledge, and recognized that if Rolling Stone was thus favored by the railway, all his efforts to boom his own town would be fruitless. The struggle between the two points had already reached a dangerous pitch. Red Fee was unscrupulous, and determined on a bold game to bluff this new move of his adversary. He would set fire to Rolling Stone, and wipe it out of existence in a night.

Tom had learned this by overhearing a conversation between Red Fee and Curt Thomas. The talk had occurred but a short time before, and immediately at its conclusion, Red Fee had started for Rolling Stone to put his scheme into effect. Tom had followed as quickly as possible; but he had been delayed by the changes necessary to be made in his personal appearance—for he had feared to venture out as Rose Latham.

This short halt had enabled Red Fee to reach the town and fire the building, but did not give him time to escape. Tom had discovered and assaulted him, and the struggle had ensued. But the young man felt sure that Fee did not recognize his assailant as Rose Latham, the secretary.

CHAPTER XI.

FIGHTING FIRE.

THIS explanation had barely been given when Quintius Quartz saw a tongue of flame issue from the upper room of the office he and the assayer had so recently vacated. The building beyond it was also on fire; and it seemed more than likely that the incendiary had applied the torch there first, and that the fire, having gained headway there, had communicated to the upper part of the office.

The crushing thought that the town was doomed, came to both the assayer and his brother. The inhabitants were now gathering in force, and strenuous efforts were being made to fight the flames, preparations for the work being chiefly directed to the larger houses.

Quintius turned from these and ran toward the office, after directing Tom to remain with the men and do what he could.

There were many small articles of value above the office, which he desired to save. Chief among them was a bundle of papers, principally evidence incriminating Felix Redmond in a number of ways, both before and after his coming to Lucky Ledge. The collection of these had cost Quintius a good deal of time and money, and he was not willing to lose them. Especially was this so since this latest outrage.

He had placed them in the upper room, thinking they would be safer there than elsewhere.

At the rear of the office, and reaching to the upper room, was a rope. There was a stairway leading from the lower room to the one above, but the door communicating with it was locked,

and Quintius recalled the distressing fact that the key was in the pocket of a coat he had not with him. Therefore, the only way to reach the upper apartment was by means of the dangling rope.

Quintius was not possessed of a sailor's expertness at rope-climbing, but he was active and sinewy. He was resolved that those papers must be secured, if it could possibly be done. There were only two ladders in the town, and the men engaged in fighting the other fire were making use of those.

He reached the rope at a run, grasped it, and began to draw himself up, hand-over-hand. The building was not of great height; nevertheless, the task was one to tax all his strength. With every muscle strained, he worked slowly up the squirming rope, coiling the lower part about his legs at times, that he might stop and rest.

He was within a yard of the upper floor, when the door above him was suddenly burst open, and a man leaped over his head and to the ground. Quintius was so startled that he came near letting go and falling headlong.

And well he might be startled! The man bore the bloody face of the ghost of the Grizzly Bear Mine.

As soon as the fellow's feet touched the earth, he leaped up and darted away as nimbly as Red Fee had done.

As before stated, Quintius Quartz had never seen the ghost of the mine; but he had heard descriptions of it, and these descriptions tallied exactly with the figure seen.

For a moment he clung to the rope, bewildered and trembling, hesitating between a desire to descend and investigate this mystery, and to continue on his way. The man had disappeared in the gloom beyond the firelight; and, after a moment of thought, Quintius climbed toilsomely on.

He gained the room, which was already well filled with smoke; and after securing the papers and valuables, hastened down.

The men were contending gallantly against the fire. The supply of water was wholly inadequate, however, and they could do little. By means of buckets passed from man to man up the ladders, they saved some of the buildings furthest removed from the conflagration; but those in which it started, with the ones adjoining, were destroyed.

"And now what's to be done?" the railway man inquired, when the flames had died down and he and Quintius were once more in conversation. "I'm afraid you're done up, my friend! Your stamp-mill is gone, and all your machinery and appliances, and your houses. The outlook is a little blue."

Quintius was trembling from the strain to which he had been subjected.

"I am here, yet!" he declared, with a sudden show of vehemence. "And so long as I can move a finger, I'll not surrender. The scoundrel has burned me out; and the worst of it is, I'll not be able to prove it against him. Tom and I recognized him, but no one else did; and we would be considered prejudiced witnesses. I am in better shape, though, than when I commenced the fight. He left me for dead, then. I'm very much alive, now; and he'll find it out before I'm through with him!"

"This will not prejudice the chances of the railway?"

"A great deal of the property in which I was to have an interest is gone!" was the dubious answer.

"I understand that, but I have another proposition. Get your railway here within a month, and I will convey to you seven-eighths of all my interests!"

"Which will leave you practically nothing!"

"That is true! But I'm in the game to win, and I'll do it if it takes everything I have. If I can't down Lucky Ledge, I'm gone, anyway. If I do it, and secure the Grizzly Bear Mine, I'm all right. Red Fee has robbed me, and now has burned me out! Will you accept my proposal?"

After some reflection, the officer expressed a willingness to do so; and the contract was written out that night and signed, the officer departing for Sunset City before daybreak.

Quintius had said nothing to him of the mysterious figure that had leaped from the upper room of the office. He knew not what to say, or if it was the part of wisdom to say anything. Hence, his silence.

"Who was this strange creature?" he asked himself time and again, without getting any satisfactory reply.

It did not seem possible that the "ghost" could have been there in collusion with Red Fee, engaged with Fee in firing the buildings. Every-

thing in the past tended to show that this could not be the case; and if not, who was he, and what had he been doing?

CHAPTER XII.

LAYING FOR THE GHOST.

RED FEE was much disconcerted by the attack made on him by Tom, and was shaken by well-grounded fears when he rushed from the place. He had not recognized Tom, and rested under the delusion that the assault had come from one of the Rolling Stone miners. But he knew Quartz well enough, and could not doubt that Quartz knew him.

A shivering sense of dread hung over him as he hurried homeward through the night. He anticipated arrest; and until morning walked nervously up and down the narrow confines of his office, trying to shape some plan of defense. His courage grew with the coming of day and the non-appearance of the officers.

At a very early hour he sallied out to ascertain the exact nature of the damage done by the fire. The towns were so close together that he had been able to view the conflagration from his office window; but he sought more definite information. Even yet the red glow from the ruins tinged the eastern sky.

The fire had summoned almost the entire population of Lucky Ledge, and many of these were still returning, dropping in by twos and threes, discussing the catastrophe and its probable origin. To the most obtuse, it was plain that the buildings had been fired, and much speculation was indulged in as to why they were fired and by whom.

The absence of Red Fee from the crowd surrounding the buildings had not been noticed, and he now mingled with the speakers and heard their comments without attracting suspicion.

His uneasiness abated as the hours wore by and Quintius Quartz made no movement; and he rightly judged that Quartz feared to trust to the slender evidence he might be able to bring against his enemy. Discourse with friends and boon companions—for Red Fee had these in abundance—increased his growing confidence; and before nightfall he had cast aside his fears and was again plotting and scheming in the old way.

Now that Rolling Stone was practically destroyed, he felt sure of success for Lucky Ledge. But this faith was quickly shadowed; for within less than two days it became positively known that the railroad was to be continued from Sunset City to Rolling Stone, which was to be its terminal point for an indefinite period.

The Sunset City papers were filled with reports and rumors concerning this new enterprise; and much disturbed, Red Fee visited that lively town to learn the exact truth, and endeavor to induce the railway officials to continue the road on to Lucky Ledge.

He found his worst fears verified. The railway was to be extended to Rolling Stone, but not a yard further; and neither money nor promises could induce those in authority to reconsider their decision.

Red Fee returned to Lucky Ledge a desperate man. In spite of his villainous scheming and crimes, ruin stared him in the face. Rolling Stone was rising on its ashes like a veritable phoenix, and the restless and shifting population gathered at Lucky Ledge were moving or preparing to move to the more favored location, guided by an instinct akin to that of the rat that leaves the sinking vessel.

He bestirred himself with all his might to counteract the many influences that were working against him. Early and late, night and day, he talked, persuaded, argued; set on foot schemes innumerable for the revival of the waning business of his town; predicted untold fortunes and glorious futures for those who remained true to it—but all to no purpose. The men were going, and nothing could stay them; and as the days slipped into weeks, and the railway began to crawl snake-like across the ridges between Sunset City and Rolling Stone, the flight became a panic.

He had kept his secretary more than busy all this time with appealing letters to parties in the East. He had sent out untold thousands of circulars and pamphlets extolling the wonderful mineral resources of Lucky Ledge, and its unsurpassed advantages from a mining and commercial standpoint; but all to no effect. Postage and energy were alike wasted. There is nothing so difficult to revive as a waning boom.

The railway was now within five miles of Rolling Stone and would enter that town in less than a week; and Red Fee, sitting gloomily in his office one evening, considered this and all that had befallen him, and determined to again

make an effort to rescue the Grizzly Bear Mine from the grasp of the spook.

That was really the only mine there worth the working. It was indeed a valuable mine, and if he could drag up from its bowels the great wealth there stored, he might even yet tide over his ill-fortunes. Now, it was a useless property, wholly abandoned by the miners. No offers of increased pay had been able to secure its working.

Red Fee had tried not to think about it, and in the rush of business had succeeded fairly well. He had a spell of the shivers whenever his thoughts turned on the ghostly manifestations.

"I'll do it!" he declared at last, after fidgeting for a long time in an effort to come to some resolve. "That's a slick game being played by Quintius Quartz, or by some one he's hired to do the ghost trick."

He tried to speak the words firmly, but they did not entirely reassure him. He could not but recall how his shots had failed of effect; and he had always prided himself on being an excellent marksman with the pistol.

"I don't see how I missed him, when he was a-standin' out that fair and open, but I surely did!"

He got up and walked nervously from one end of the room to the other.

"Yes; I'll do it!" he again exclaimed, taking out his revolver and examining it.

The grip of the weapon appeared to add to his kindling spirits. He slipped the cartridges from the cylinder, refilling it with fresh ones from a cartridge-case in the drawer of his desk.

"Them look all right, and they're big enough to go through either man or spirit, without any trouble!"

He thrust the weapon into his hip-pocket, and sat down again to watch the slow-going hours.

He did not touch the liquor-bottle this time, having some weeks before reached the conclusion that a whisky-fuddled head was not the sort of head needed to compete with the assayer.

Tom Craigen, in the disguise of the typewriter, had been holding social converse with Louise in the parlor, and was on his way to his room as Red Fee left the house. He had descended with light steps, knowing from the lamp in the office that Red Fee was still there, and hoping he might learn something to his and his brother's advantage by a surreptitious advance along the narrow corridor.

Red Fee had just stepped into the rear yard, having previously extinguished the office lamp, and was examining his revolver by the light of the moon, when Tom saw him.

Like intuition came the knowledge to the young man that Fee intended a visit to the mine; and he resolved to follow him. His curiosity had long been aroused by the reports of the strange doings at the Grizzly Bear.

After looking at his weapon, Red Fee moved away in the direction of the mine; and Tom Craigen, not given time or opportunity to discard his feminine toggery, came after.

Red Fee moved rapidly, and it did not take him long to reach the mouth of the mine. Tom Craigen was close at his heels, and crawled into the tunnel-like entrance only a few moments after Fee vanished.

He halted here, fearing to go further, and waiting to be guided by sounds of Fee's movements. None such came, and in a crouching posture he remained there long and anxiously.

Fee was also waiting: waiting for the ghost to appear. But though the hour of midnight came and went, nothing occurred to disturb the serenity of the night.

Tom, tired out by ineffectual watching, was about to retreat, when Red Fee, moving back along the passage at the same time, almost tumbled against him.

Red Fee uttered a cry of horror, recoiling violently in the idea that he had come unexpectedly on the ghost; and Tom, equally frightened, also uttered an exclamation and essayed to gain the outer entrance. That exclamation told Red Fee that this was not the ghost. In spite of its startled character, Tom's cry held a strangely familiar sound. In fact, Red Fee was almost sure he recognized the voice as that of his typewriter.

"Cuss ye!" he gritted, recovering and springing forward. "I'll kill ye fer that!"

Tom could not doubt that this was meant in earnest, and the fear of a pistol-shot from Red Fee's revolver added wings to his feet.

But the wings were destined to be clipped. He stumbled against a stone, and rolled headlong on the rocky floor.

Before he could regain his footing, Red Fee had reached him and grasped him firmly by the shoulder.

"What air ye doin' hyer?" was the angry question, as he dragged the seeming girl toward the outside. "It's you that's been playin' ghost, is it? Well; I'll take occasion to learn ye something!"

Tom was almost too startled and frightened to reply; and besides, he had no adequate answer ready.

"Now, what air you doin' hyer?" Red Fee fiercely demanded, when they were out in the starlight and he could see he had made no mistake. "Rose Latham, have you been a-playin' this ghost business? If I thought you had, I'd murder you!"

"Indeed, Mr. Redmond!" Tom pleaded, clinging to his feminine character. "Indeed, I know nothing about it! I—I have not been playing ghost. I—I—"

He shook her as a spaniel might shake a rat.

"Tell me what you air doin' hyer, then!" fairly shouting the order. "Speak up, now, and no nonsense! What was you a-doin' hyer?"

Rose Latham, taking refuge in a well-known feminine weakness, began to sob hysterically.

"It was mere cu-curiousity!" she wailed. "Nothing else, Mr. Redmond, I assure you. I had no—no intention of doing anything wrong! There's been so mu-much talk about the ghost of the mine, that I thought I'd come down and try to get a peep at it. I didn't know you were in there; and when—when you ran against me—I—I thought you were the ghost! Boo-hoo—oo!"

There were some weaknesses in the story, and Red Fee's distrust was not removed by it. But the sobbing declarations were not without effect. He released his painful grasp, and stood looking sternly at her.

"I don't know, yit, but you're a-lyin' to me!" he declared, "and if I find out you air, it'll go hard with you. I'll let you off this time, but you needn't think I sha'n't be watchin' you."

She interrupted him by a fresh outburst of grief.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" he suddenly questioned.

"I—I can't say that I do," tremblingly. "I never saw one."

"Ner nobody else. That is, the genuine article. There's plenty of make-believe ones, like the one that's been playin' hob with the Grizzly Bear."

He turned toward the town, without inviting her to accompany him; which she proceeded to do, however, notwithstanding this lack.

Another series of sobs shook her form. It would not do to lose the good opinion of Felix Redmond at this stage of the game, and she was resolved she would not, if tears could avail.

"You're a brave one, Miss Latham, I must say!" dropping back to accommodate his steps to hers. "There ain't many women would venture into a ha'nted mine like that. If you'll go ag'in and kill the ghost fer me, and bring me proof that you've killed him, I'll give you a thousand dollars!"

The proposition was met with more sobbing. Miss Latham would agree to do nothing of the kind; and still under the shadow of his displeasure and distrust, they reached the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

A QUEER PROPOSAL.

A FURTHER conversation ensued when the office was gained; and the result of that conversation convinced Tom Craigen that his period of usefulness as Red Fee's secretary was ended.

Throughout the walk from the mine Red Fee had been in a hesitating state of mind. No suspicion of the true character of Rose Latham came to him, and the potency of her feminine charms was still strong. But the thought constantly gained ground that she was untrue to his business interests. Her lame excuses had not satisfied him; and he wondered time and again if she was not, after all, the one who had been playing ghost.

Tom retired to his room much agitated. Red Fee had hinted that his services could be there-after dispensed with.

"Not on account of this business," he had said. "But you've seen yourself that for the last two weeks I hain't hardly had anything for you to do."

Notwithstanding this assertion, Tom knew that the true reason for his dismissal lay in the events of that night. He could not doubt it; for, though business had been slack, Red Fee had never hinted that he would not further need him.

The dismissal did not so much concern him. He had already mainly accomplished the object which had induced him to assume the disguise of a feminine typewriter and enter Red Fee's employ. He was distressed because, in leaving

the house, he would lose the pleasant conversations with Louise. There had grown up in his heart a strong love for this girl.

Louise, on her part, had become extremely fond of the typewriter, never dreaming of the deception the latter was practicing. They were together a great deal, especially of evenings; and thus Tom was enabled to study the girl's character, and understand the true nobility of her nature.

He had been more than once abased in his own estimation by the part he was playing. It seemed a treacherous and mean thing to do, to thus gain the girl's confidence. But he excused himself with the strange circumstances of the case, reasoning that he could not do otherwise. Many times he had desired to reveal himself to her, but had not dared. To have done so would have been to defeat all his purposes in coming there.

Now, however, that he was to leave the place, he was resolved to speak out and tell her who he was, and to express his regard for her.

Tom slept little that night, tossing and rolling uneasily, his mind so wrought up by thoughts of these things!

The only conclusion he came to was that he would leave the house early in the morning, return some time during the forenoon, clothed in his proper masculine garments, and seek the desired interview. But events prevented the carrying out of this programme.

Louise chanced to be in the corridor, as he essayed to make his way to the street. Her fresh and blooming beauty quite overpowered him. The sudden fear that a delay might be fatal, pressed upon him. There was no knowing, he thought, but that Red Fee might so poison her mind in the interval of his absence that she would not listen to him, or even meet him when he came again.

He could not forget his feminine apparel; and he blushed crimson, as he encountered her and requested a few words of conversation.

"I presume you know I am going away?" questioningly, taking her hand.

"No; surely not, Miss Latham!"

"Yes; I am on the way to the street now. I shall send for my things. Your father has no further use for me."

Louise seemed distressed.

"Are you blind, Louise, that you have known me so long and have not guessed my secret?" again reddening painfully.

Louise started. There was an unaccountable change in the accents of this supposed girl friend. The low, feminine tones, assumed by Tom as an additional disguise, had been thrown aside. His voice naturally had something of the cadence of a woman's, a peculiarity that had been exaggerated.

"I—I—do not understand!" Louise stammered.

A sudden fear that this friend was losing her mental faculties came to her.

"You are blind, Louise! Will you forgive me for the deception? I am not Rose Latham—a woman, as you suppose; but am Tom Craigen, a brother of Philip Craigen, who is known as Quintius Quartz, the assayer."

Louise gave a little scream of fright, and seemed about to fly.

"Stay!" Tom adjured, catching her by the arm and detaining her. "Stay until you have heard me out! You will not hate me for this, Louise? Assure me you will not! For oh, Louise! I love you better than life itself! Not as one woman might love another; but as one man loves one woman!"

Louise stood transfixed, apparently unable to speak or move, so overwhelmed was she by this surprising revelation.

"Tell me you are not offended!" Tom pleaded. "Only tell me that, and I will go away—"

His appeal was brought to a sudden end.

The door of the office was quickly and angrily burred open, and Red Fee appeared on the scene. Neither had dreamed of his presence there, as he had never been in the habit of visiting the office at so early an hour.

"Oh, you'll go away, will you?" darting forward and clutching Tom by the shoulder and dashing him harshly against the wall. "I guess I'll have somethin' to say about that! So, you're Phil Craigen's brother?"

He drew his revolver and for a moment it seemed that he meant to empty its contents into the body of his false secretary.

Tom, who was wholly unarmed, was seized with a panic of fear. He put out his hands imploringly, as if to ward off a blow.

"I'm the biggest fool this side of the divide, fer not knowin' that before! But you'll git a chance to do no more dirt!"

Louise screamed, believing her father intended murder.

"Shet yer yawp, will ye?" turning fiercely on her. "If ye don't I'll serve you as I'm a-goin' to serve him. A man rigged out in female finery, an' playin' a game like that!"

He lifted his hand as if to strike Louise, who was sobbing bitterly.

"If you'll let me go, I'll promise not to come here again!" Tom quavered.

"Ob, yes; I'll let you go! I've already played the fool so big that I ought to wind up the game by doin' that very thing!"

He was trembling with excitement, and seemed scarcely able to restrain himself from flying like a savage bull-dog at Tom's throat. Not the least embittering reflection was that he had allowed himself to fall in love with this pretender. He felt humiliated beyond measure. He had never so played the fool before.

"Hyer I've been a lettin' you into all the secrets of my business, an' a-givin' you the run of my affairs! It's no wonder that Quintius Quartz has been able to lay it over me!"

Red Fee had some time before come to the conclusion that Philip Craigen and Quintius Quartz were one and the same; and now he was sure of it.

Tom cowered guiltily, shrinking against the wall and trying to edge toward the door. He was brave enough under ordinary circumstances; but there was such deadly menace in the eyes of Red Fee, and he was so unnerved by this sudden exposure, that his usual courage quite vanished.

"No, you don't!" observing the movement toward the door, and striding forward with the revolver ready in his hand. "You don't leave hyer, except as you go with me!"

"Now, you go to your room!" turning threatening to Louise. "And if you leave this house before I git back, you'll wish to yer dyin' day that you hadn't."

"Go!" as she still hesitated; and Louise, trembling like an aspen, could do nothing but retreat to her room.

"Now, you'll walk along quiet in front of me, or I'll fill ye full o' holes!" commandingly to Tom, when Louise had vanished. "No more monkey business, I tell ye!"

He pointed toward the garden.

"What are you going to do with me?" Tom ventured to ask.

"That's all right! Hunt ghosts, likely! You was uncommon fond o' huntin' 'em last night. I'm pretty well satisfied that you're the one that's been playin' that game!"

He again waved his revolver toward the rear entrance.

"March along there! I ain't got any too much patience this morning, as you'll find out, if you try me. The quicker you mind my orders, the better it'll be fer ye!"

Coerced by the weapon, Tom could do nothing but obey.

He looked anxiously about as they stepped into the garden, hoping some one might be near to whom he could call for assistance. He was disappointed.

"Yelpin' won't do y' any good!" interpreting Tom's quick glances. "An', at the fu'st one, down yo gol!"

"Where are we going?"

"To look fer that ghost! An' step along lively, or ther thing'll die of old age 'fore we git there."

He motioned in the direction of the mine, toward which a dimly defined trail led from the house.

"Right along there, d'y'e see?" An' hold up them dain'ty skirts, er the sage brush'll slice 'em into ribbons. You're an uncommon peart female this mornin'! An' purty! Ob, my!"

There was a bitterness in this that showed how deeply the iron had entered his soul. He would never be able to forgive himself for his late obtuseness.

More than once Tom Craigen was on the point of attempting to break away by running. But the certain knowledge that he would be fired upon, and the almost equally certain knowledge that he could not fail to be hit, held this desire in check. An indefinable fear of what might occur when the mine was reached took possession of him.

The black entrance soon came into view, and at sight of it Tom shrank back.

"On there with ye!" was the stern command. "That ghost's jist a-dyin' fer our society. You can occupy your time in makin' love to it. It'll appreciate the kindness."

Notwithstanding the sternness with which this was spoken, Tom hung back as they gained the opening, though he realized that now he was

wholly in Red Fee's power. There was no shrinking on Red Fee's part; no abating of his fierceness.

At the point of the revolver, he forced Tom into the mine, and toward the one narrow gallery that had been opened.

The light of the new day came in but dimly.

"There's where I'm a-goin' to hole ye up!" pointing to the gallery, which seemed to intersect the heart of the mountain. "You can take yer choice! Walk in there peaceable and sensible-like; er I'll put a ball into ye, an' then drag you in!"

Tom saw that there was no help for it, and so summoned all his resolution to sustain his shrinking spirits; and walked into the tunnel-like place with as firm a step as he could assume.

A few feet beyond the entrance he had to stoop, the opening narrowing down to a throat-like aperture, beyond which it again expanded.

Against this small opening Red Fee tossed boulders, backing these up by larger and still larger ones; and bracing all from the outside by some heavy timbers which had been brought there to serve as props.

It was as secure a prison as could be desired.

"Perhaps the ghost will let ye out!" Red Fee bawled, when he had completed his task to his satisfaction. "No one else will come near you, no matter how you shout!"

CHAPTER XIV.

RED FEE DEFIANT.

QUINTIUS QUARTZ viewed with satisfaction the rapid progress that was being made in rebuilding Rolling Stone. There were many drops of bitterness, however, in this cup of delight. The money necessary to carry on the work had been obtained at ruinously usurious interest. Much of it had cost him five per cent. a month, or the rate of sixty per cent. per annum, and payment would have to be made in sixty and ninety days. It was a fearful burden to assume, and he had done it only because he could do nothing else.

He was in the same condition that Red Fee felt himself to be in. He must either regain the Grizzly Bear Mine, or go to the wall. His debts were already more than enough to swallow his small remaining stock in the mine of Rolling Stone. He could not doubt that he was succeeding in ruining Lucky Ledge; but he often questioned if he was not, like Samson, crushing himself with his enemies.

He had believed that before this, Fee would be forced to a sale of the Grizzly Bear at so low a rate that he could afford to buy it in. Fee had offered it for sale to some of Quartz's agents—of course not knowing they were such—but his figures were still too high to suit the assayer. And the days and weeks were crawling by, constantly bringing nearer the periods of payment.

Feeling thus, he called on Fee; this visit occurring, as it chanced, on the night following the morning in which Fee had jailed Tom in the mine.

He found Fee very much disturbed, though of course could not guess why.

The latter glared at him angrily, as he entered the room and coolly helped himself to a seat.

"I came to see you on a little business," said the assayer, smoothly.

"Out with it, then!" Red Fee exclaimed, feeling that, as there was no love to lose between them, there was no use in mincing words.

Quartz quietly drew from his pocket the claim notice he had exhibited on a previous occasion.

"There's no one to hear us here, is there?"

"Not unless you've brought some spy along!"

The assayer looked at him sharply and inquiringly.

"I don't know that I need to care who hears this. You're the one that ought to care!"

"Oh, am I? Mebbe you'll be so good, then, as to tell me what it is!"

"No doubt you've guessed before this that when I came here representing Philip Craigen, I came representing myself!"

Red Fee's face was as immovable as a rock. He did not intend to be caught.

"I am Philip Craigen!"

"Oh, you air? I've been thinkin' all the time that there wasn't no such a man."

"Yes; I'm Philip Craigen; and I've come to demand, for the last time, that you turn over to me the Grizzly Bear Mine, or its equivalent. It's mine, as you well know; and I've about got ready the evidence to convince the world of the fact."

Red Fee stared at him with hostile and supercilious unbelief.

"And I've also collected evidence to show that you set fire to Rolling Stone!"

In spite of his iron nerve, Red Fee could not repress a start, as he listened to this charge.

Quartz, who was watching him closely, noted this.

"I recognized you at the time; but my proof was not sufficient then to make a case, and I held my peace. Now, I am ready to move on your works. In the language of a certain general, I shall accept nothing but 'unconditional surrender!'"

Red Fee's hand had dropped to the revolver butt that was elevating his coat-tails, and he now glared at his adversary in a most vicious and vindictive way.

"Now, I've a proposition to make," paying no heed to Red Fee's warlike attitude. "The Grizzly Bear is mine, in all justice and fairness. You know that as well as I do; and you may as well believe me when I say that I intend to get it back! There is one thing I will do: I will repay you whatever you are out for the opening of the mine; for all machinery and work and necessary expenses. You know that the mine is worth very little at the present time!"

"And who made it wu'thless?" Red Fee hotly demanded. "Who is it that's been birin' some one to play ghost there, an' scare the lives out o' the miners?"

"Not I, I assure you!"

"Oh, you didn't! You're a very innocent sort o' critter, Mr. Quartz! Now, I happen to know that you're the very gentleman that's been a-doin' that! I've run that ghost business down, an' I know what I'm a-talkin' about!"

The assayer could not know what discoveries Red Fee had made, and scarcely knew what to reply.

"Whatever you have found out, I know it does not implicate me."

"No? Well," angrily and somewhat ineffectually, "you can bet yer boots that yer ghost won't play any of his tricks again! I've pulled his teeth—clipped his claws!"

The assayer did not connect these statements in any manner with his brother.

"I don't care anything about the ghost! I do want to know, though, if you intend to surrender this mine?"

"Not to you!" was Red Fee's wrathful reply. "You can't prove what you say, an' you're only tryin' to frighten me out of my property. But you'll not do it! You may as well understand that, fu'st as last!"

"But this proof I have against you? This proof that you fired the town?"

"Which you hain't got!" bristling aggressively. "Crack yer whip, Quintius Quartz! I never stole the Grizzly Bear Mine; an' I never set fire to your windy old town! Your proof! Bab!"

"Then you refuse to do anything?"

"It ain't the mine you want to buy, Quintius Quartz! You want me to pay you for your silence! I sha'n't do it! You ought to have sense enough to know, that, after the fight we've been makin' against each other, nothin' you can say about me would be believed. It would be put down to spite and enmity. I think you know that, as well as I do."

Quartz did know it, though he would not say so. He saw that nothing was to be gained by further talk; and after reiterating his charges and threats, took his departure.

CHAPTER XV.

A WOMAN'S COURAGE.

As Quintius Quartz left the house, he was confronted in the darkness by Louise Norton. She did not approach him while he was near the office, but some distance away, and near the street.

Her first words showed him that she had been crying.

"Oh, Mr. Quartz! Your brother!"

Quartz gave a gasp of surprise and wonderment.

"My brother?" he queried.

"Yes, your brother—Mr. Tom Craigen, the—the typewriter girl!"

The assayer could scarcely find his tongue to reply. A storm of contending thoughts and theories possessed him. How had the girl gained this knowledge?

"I don't know that I understand you!" striving for time and further information.

She proceeded hastily to explain. It was not an easy task, for she did not desire to speak of Tom's confession of love.

"Why, Mr. Redmond found out this morning that your brother was not what he seemed to be! That, in fact, he was not a girl at all, but a

man, and your brother. And then—then he dragged him away! And oh, I'm afraid, Mr. Quartz, that something dreadful has happened!"

Even in the faint light, Quartz could see her clasp her hands appealingly.

"Come further away," he requested, in an agitated whisper. "We are liable to be overheard here."

He drew her deeper into the shadows.

"How did Mr. Redmond discover this?"

It was a pointed question and not easily evaded.

"He heard Mr. Craigen talking to me—and something that was said revealed it to him."

"Did you know of the deception before?"

"I did not. I never dreamed of such a thing!"

"And you do not know where Tom was taken?" in deepest anxiety.

There was again a negative reply.

Quartz was lost for a moment in thought. He knew how desperate was Red Fee; and the experience already had with the man was enough to show that he would hesitate at no crime.

"You fear the worst?" gently questioning her, for he could only be grateful to this girl who was accepting such risks to aid him.

"I don't know what to fear! I don't know what to do!"

Again he was silent.

"Do you think you would have courage enough to do a bit of spying and trailing, should it become necessary? If your father—if Mr. Redmond has done anything desperate in the matter, it may be hard to find it out. It will be hard, anyway. But if he hasn't killed the boy, the fact may be revealed by watching him, and following him. Would you be willing to undertake the task, Miss Norton? I don't know who else to ask, or of any one who would have an opportunity to do it so well as yourself. Redmond may already be leaving the house."

"I will hurry to Rolling Stone, advise with friends, gather a body of men, and return as quickly as possible."

"I will do what I can," she timidly promised. "I fear it will not be much. You don't know what a temper Mr. Redmond has, when he is aroused."

She was much agitated, and her voice shook.

The assayer felt that no time was to be lost; and with a few words of counsel and encouragement, he hastened away.

It was some time before she could muster sufficient spirit to turn again toward the house.

As she did so, she saw Red Fee glide down the garden walk in the direction of the mine; and, with a prayer for strength, she followed close after him, flitting along like a shadow.

She did not at once pass through the opening into the mine, as she saw Fee do, but hung about the place, filled with strange fears.

She could scarcely bring herself to venture in. But this she did, after a time. The floor was uneven, and she stumbled along blindly, in constant terror lest she should be discovered.

She could not see Red Fee; but she fancied she heard him talking or mumbling to himself, and crept in the direction of the sounds.

She did not dare approach too near, and crouched in a depression, trying to ascertain what was occurring.

Red Fee soon retreated, passing very close to her, causing her to shiver with fear. He continued on toward the entrance, however.

She now knew not what to do. An impression that Tom Craigen was blocked in the mine somewhere had grown on her, and she had even fancied that what she had heard might be a conversation between him and Red Fee. But this might only be fancy. She hesitated, asking herself whether she should again follow Red Fee, or make a search of the place.

Before she could decide, she was thrown into a panic by the sudden blazing forth of a light. It came from a lantern, the flame of which was turned low. By the gleam of the lantern she caught her first glimpse of the mysterious inhabitant of the mine.

Louise Norton was not at all superstitious, her brain being far too clear and well-balanced to permit a belief in ghostly appearances. Nevertheless, she could not repress an involuntary start of fright and awe. She had listened to descriptions of this particular ghost, and these descriptions tallied exactly with what she now saw. There could be no mistaking that horribly bloody visage.

She crouched even lower than before, clasping her hands and almost holding her breath; and remained in that position until the uncanny thing had passed from sight. To judge from its actions and the direction taken, it was pursuing Red Fee.

She arose to her feet, and was about to hurry from the place, when a voice reached and detained her. It was the voice of Tom Craigen.

CHAPTER XVI. A PROMISE OF HELP.

THE distress of Tom Craigen when left in the darkness of his prison by Red Fee was beyond description.

He felt sure there was not an avenue of escape. Still, hope did not desert him. He was too young, and his nature too buoyant for that. A hundred things might happen to bring about his release. He resolved not to admit that he could not release himself; but set to work at once to test the strength of the barricade raised by Red Fee.

He might have lifted and moved some of the stones, if he could have got at them in a way to exercise his strength on them. This he could not do because of the narrowness of the tunnel at the point where the barricade commenced. Nevertheless, the boulders were of such size that they did not join closely together, and at one point the interstices were so connected that he could look through them into the cave, which was a mass of gloom, except immediately about the entrance.

He pushed and strained at the nearest boulder, lacerating his hands badly in his endeavors; but he accomplished nothing.

It seemed useless to look for a way out at the other end of the tunnel, yet he kept along the rough floor until that end was reached, feeling everywhere for an opening. Of course, none was found, and he stole back, heart-sore and faint.

As the sun mounted higher and higher, pouring some of its light through the entrance, the various objects in the cave became visible; and for hours Tom crouched before the narrow slit, peering out in the hope that some one might venture within, to whom he could call. But the day wore away, and the mine remained unvisited.

It was a long and weary day, filled with anxiety and pain, combined with the pangs of hunger and thirst.

Some time after nightfall, Tom was startled, as he looked out, by seeing the ghost enter. It swung along, with the lantern in its hand, very much as an ordinary man might have done.

The lantern was set down; and then with a miner's pick, the strange figure began to tap on the wall, producing a succession of the clinking sounds which had so often been heard.

Tom was so sure it was a man, that he called out to it, appealing for help.

Almost instantly the pick was dropped and the lantern extinguished; and the ghost ran away, like any badly-scared mortal.

Tom watched anxiously for its return; but, when it came again, though he called to it in his most pleading tones, it paid no heed, continuing to tap at the walls as if unconscious of his presence.

Suddenly the lantern was turned low, and the strange thing vanished beyond one of the rocky buttresses of the interior; and almost immediately thereafter, Red Fee made his appearance, coming straight up to Tom's prison.

"Won't you please let me out of here?" Tom begged. "I shall die if you keep me in here longer!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughing disagreeably. "I don't know that that ought to worry me. It'll save me the trouble o' killin' ye!"

The words were utterly heartless.

Tom saw that it was useless to beg for leniency, and remained silent.

"I might listen to you, an' have some little pity on ye, if you'd ever had any on me. I can tell ye one thing, though, that likely'll be pleasant: you're a-goin' to have company pretty soon, in the person of Mr. Quintius Quartz, your brother. It'll be pleasanter like. You two can talk together, an' figger out how you've downed Felix Redmond. I've no doubt there'll be a deal of comfort in it!"

The tones were irritating and mocking.

Red Fee could not refrain from some further thrusts at the hapless young man, before releasing him.

He had scarcely vanished through the entrance, when the ghost reappeared, moving along with the dimly-burning lantern, as if trailing him.

Tom Craigen was about to turn back to his prison, sick with disappointed hope, when his keen eyes caught the outline of a shadowy female figure. He knew this could not be Red Fee or the ghost, and impulsively called to it.

When she heard that call, Louise Norton uttered a little cry of fright. She did not fly

from the place, however; but turned about and looked in the direction from whence the voice came.

"It's me! Tom Craigen! I don't know who you are; but if you are a woman, I know you will try to help me. I am shut up here in this tunnel!"

Louise hurried toward him, trembling violently. She could see nothing, and therefore had only the voice to guide her. She was afraid, too, that Red Fee might return, attracted by Tom's words.

"Who are you?" Tom hoarsely whispered; and when Louise made herself known to him his joy passed all bounds.

He tremulously explained how he had been shut in there by Red Fee.

"You will find the entrance blocked with stones, and these propped and braced by timbers."

Louise hurriedly felt over the barricade, and then strove with all her might to lift the braces.

"I can't do it!" she panted. "They are so heavy, and are squeezed in here so tight that I can't budge them!"

Again Tom's hopes fell.

"Can't you remove them in any way?" The girl tried once more; and was obliged to confess she could not.

"You will go, then, and bring some one who can? Oh, Louise! Louise! To think that we should meet again in this way!"

"I came to look for you, and to help you!" she said, softly, understanding something of his thoughts. "I'll go, and at once! I had a talk with your brother, to-night, and he has gone to Rolling Stone to get help. I will meet him and guide him and his men here."

Tom was about to overwhelm her with thanks; but she had glided away, feeling that time was too precious to be wasted in unnecessary talk.

CHAPTER XVII.

FEE MAKES A CAPTURE.

It was with a rapidly beating heart that Tom Craigen listened to Louise's retreating footsteps. He had seen Red Fee and the ghost vanish in the direction she was compelled to take, and a sudden fear for her personal safety came to him.

That his fear had foundation was quickly shown. A scream arose from the entrance, followed by harsh words from Red Fee.

Louise, in attempting to make her way out, had run almost into Fee's arms; and before she was aware of his presence, one of his strong hands had closed on her shoulder in a vise-like grip, extorting the scream which Tom heard.

Red Fee was much surprised when he discovered who his captive was. He had caught the gleam of the ghost's lantern, and was lying in wait; but the ghost had turned in another direction; and just as Red Fee was about to make his way back into the cave, Louise had appeared in the entrance. The angry man placed one of his big palms over her mouth to still any further cries, and harshly dragged her outside.

"What air you doin' hyer?" he fiercely demanded, raising his hand as if to strike. "Tell me that, or I'll murder ye!"

Louise was stubbornly silent. Although desperately frightened, she realized that confession might make her position worse.

"You fellered me hyer!" Fee savagely growled. "I know that well enough! An' you come to git that two-faced critter out of his scrape? I guess I'll see somethin' about that myself. Now, you'll come along with me, er I'll know why?"

He jerked her angrily forward, pushing her into the path that led toward the house.

"It's mighty strange, when even my own fam'ly turns ag'in' me!" was his bitter comment, as he urged her on. "As if it wasn't enough to have these bounds a doggin' me!"

Louise made no reply to this outburst. She was greatly terrified by what had occurred, well knowing the vindictiveness of Red Fee's nature. Her anxiety for Tom was also great; and she racked her wits in vain for a plan by which she might acquaint his brother with his position.

Red Fee did not allow her to halt until the house had been gained. Then he pushed her in front of him into the hall, and drew the door to after them and locked it.

"When you git a chance to play a trick like that ag'in, my lady, you'll know it!" glowering at her. "I didn't think you'd side with my enemies, er I'd have watched you; but I'll know what to expect in the future!"

He motioned her on, and pointed to the stairway that led from the corridor.

"You'll go up to your room, an' you'll stay there until I choose to let you out! An' that won't be in a hurry!"

Louise dared not refuse. Her face showed white and drawn under the swinging lamp that illuminated the corridor, and her eyes were tear-filled. She was trembling, too; so violently she could hardly stand.

"Go on!" he growled, as she seemed to hesitate. "I don't want to have to make ye; an' you'll regret it, if you drive me to it. I ain't in any mood for foolin'!"

His words were not necessary to reveal this. It was shown by his entire manner.

Louise turned wearily toward the stairway, up which she advanced in front of him. When her room was gained, he pushed open the door and commanded her to enter.

She obeyed submissively; and when he had locked the door and pocketed the key, he left her.

His thoughts were in such a whirl that he was forced to pace for a time up and down the corridor, before he could determine on a definite line of action.

For several days it had been plain to him that he could no longer hold out against his enemies. His debts were overwhelming. He saw he could never pay them; and felt that, when the end came, foes more bitter than angry creditors would be arrayed against him.

While affecting to scorn the charges which Quintius Quartz had made, he was really much alarmed by them. He had been uneasy ever since he was caught near the fire at Rolling Stone; and only Quartz's long silence on that subject had lulled him into even a fancied security.

He could not always keep Tom Craigen shut up in the mine. He could slay him, it is true; and was probably only kept from it by a cowardly conscience, which was beginning to tremble at every shadow.

A rap at the office door caused him to start guiltily. So shaken was he by the events that were hemming him in, that he half feared to ascertain who the caller might be; and, as he strode toward the office, he dropped his hand to his revolver to be ready for an emergency.

It was only Curt Thomas who had rapped at that unsightly hour; and Red Fee let him in with a growling protest.

His face brightened, however, and his thoughts took a change, suggested by Thomas's presence.

"I'm gittin' tired of this business!" he declared, helping himself to a chair, after he had turned up the light.

Thomas stared at him, not comprehending his drift.

"I mean this whole damed business! The fight on Rolling Stone, the mining, and all of it! I believe I'll put out, an' just let things slide."

"You can't do it, can ye?"

"Hardly; but I can do that better than I can stay! I'm ruined, any way you put it. If I had back some of the money I put in hyer, I'd go before mornin'!"

"I'll tell ye what I'll do, Thomas: I'll sell ye my half-interest in the Grizz'y Bear for a thousand dollars, if you'll spot it down in cash."

Thomas looked at him as if he could scarcely credit the statement.

"I'll do it," he said, with great promptness; and thereupon dived into an inner pocket and drew out a roll of bills.

"Cash it is! Just look 'em over to see that I don't cheat ye in the count."

Thomas knew that only a few weeks before Red Fee had been holding the mine at fifty thousand; and he acted as if he feared that the thousand-dollar offer might be withdrawn as quickly as it had been made.

It was Red Fee's turn to exhibit amazement. He had fancied Thomas would have difficulty in raising the amount, yet he saw before him bills to the value of almost five times that.

"I thought ye told me t'other day that you was hard up?" an angry light in his eyes. "You was hard-up when I wanted to borrow a little; but you've got money to snap up a bargain, when it comes along!"

Thomas winked knowingly, not heeding the tone.

"It's all right, pard. This hyer ain't counterfeit. You can bank on that! A feller's got to look out fer Number 1!"

He counted out the thousand dollars, and rolled the remaining bills into a wad, which he thrust back into his pocket.

"There you air! Now, make out and sign the document that's to give me possession!"

Red Fee permitted the bills to lie on the table, while he took up a pen and began to write.

"Run up to Sam Burns's stable an' send 'im hyer with his fastest horse," looking up from the paper.

Thomas hesitated. He was so slippery a character himself that he feared to trust others. "I'll have this ready fer ye by the time you git back. Send Burns hyer at once!"

He resumed his writing; and Thomas, after a moment of uncertainty, left the office.

Within five minutes Burns was there; and Red Fee went out on the steps to speak with him.

"Go to Rolling Stone as fast as yer horse'll let you. Call on that law-sharp, Malcolm, and bring me the money he gives ye. Give him this, and it'll be all right."

He delivered to Burns some papers which he had taken from his desk. They were deeds, signed up in due form the day before and conveying to Malcolm all of his interests in Lucky Ledge, with the exception of the Grizzly Bear mine, for the ridiculously small sum of two thousand dollars. Malcolm had made him the offer the previous day, and the papers had been drawn; and at the last moment Red Fee had backed down and refused to deliver them.

A few words of explanation followed; but Burns was not detained a moment beyond what was necessary, and was gone before the coming of Curt Thomas.

Although Red Fee was taking this step with seeming haste, it had really been in his mind for some time, and was the outgrowth of many hours of weary and anxious thought. What had recently occurred was precipitating the catastrophe that he had felt must come; and now it only seemed the part of wisdom to save what he could from the approaching wreck and betake himself with it to some place of safety.

In comparison with the figures that had for months wreathed themselves in his rosee dreams, the amount he could bear away was small; but it was that much better than nothing; and if he remained he might not only lose it, but would in all probability lose his liberty.

He was still scribbling away, divided between his task and thoughts on his plans, when Thomas arrived. The paper was finished in a short time and delivered; and then Red Fee possessed himself of the bills.

Thomas did not remain any longer than was necessary, and went away feeling very jubilant.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BACK TO ROLLING STONE.

QUINTIUS QUARTZ had but one idea firmly fixed in his mind, as he hastened from Redmond's, after his nocturnal conversation with Louise. That was to hurry to Rolling Stone, gather a force of tried and true men, return with them and oblige Red Fee to tell what he knew of the whereabouts of Tom. Not only would he do that, but, if Tom had been imprisoned—as Quintius believed—then he could compel Fee to compromise the matter by a transfer of his interest in the Grizzly Bear Mine. This was the plan outlined by the assayer, and he did not doubt that it could be worked.

There was, of course, a possibility that Tom Craigen had been foully dealt with, and the assayer's brows darkened and his eyes flashed as he thought of this. If Red Fee, in his desperation, had gone so far as that, he resolved that a swift and bitter vengeance should overtake him.

The collecting of the men was not so easy a task as he had anticipated. Many of those on whom he most relied were absent from the town, and substitutes had to be sought. This occupied a great deal of time; and nearly two hours elapsed before he was ready to turn his face toward Lucky Ledge, at the head of a band of mounted men.

They had covered perhaps half the distance, when they heard the hoof-strokes of a horse advancing from the direction they had themselves come.

Feeling that it would not do to permit this horseman to pass, Quartz disposed his men in a semicircle across the trail. The man might be a messenger sent by friends of Red Fee to give the latter warning of the coming of Quartz's party.

The horse scented the men; and on being forced forward by its rider, whirled quickly and threw him to the ground. Before he could arise, Quartz was on him.

As the reader has suspected, this horseman was Sam Burns.

Burns was wiry and strong; and hurling Quartz desperately aside, leaped to his feet in an effort to break away. He did not know who his assailants were; but he saw the shadowy outlines of the men and horses; and thinking of

the money in his pocket, decided the men were road-agents.

They were closing about him, though; and their loud commands to halt, backed as they were by a suggestive clicking of revolvers, brought him to a stand.

A match was struck, and its light flashed into the prisoner's face.

There was a mutual recognition.

Burns gave a short, hard laugh.

"I thought you was agents, pard, and that I was done fer!"

It was an unfortunate speech. As a general thing, Sam Burns was not known to carry anything that would be likely to arouse the cupidity of a road-agent.

"You were mistaken in that; still, we must see what you've got. I'm not certain but that you're bearing a message to Red Fee. We are going for him, and we don't care to have him warned of our coming."

The match had gone out; but even the gloom could not conceal Burns's uneasiness.

The search, which was quickly made, brought to light the two thousand dollars, and a note from Malcolm to Red Fee concerning the sale.

The conclusion was irresistibly forced on Quartz that Red Fee intended to leave the country at once; and with it came an added uncertainty as to the fate of his brother. If Red Fee had murdered Tom Craigen, that would be the most powerful reason in the world for urging him to instant flight.

"You were taking these things to Redmond?" his voice harsh and choked. "Speak truly, Sam Burns, or it will be the worse for you! Redmond has borne away, and perhaps murdered, my brother; and I do not propose that he shall escape punishment for it."

It was Burns's first intimation that the assayer had a brother.

He saw, though, that Quartz was in deadly earnest, and that it would be foolhardy to anger him by a refusal to reply, or by an evasion.

"Tell me how you came by these bills?" crowding one question on another. "And why you were riding so swiftly toward Lucky Ledge? Speak up, man!"

He was trembling with excitement, and showed also that he felt there was no time to lose.

"I was carryin' them things to Red Fee," Burns avowed, thinking a direct confession the safest. "He sent me over to Malcolm's to git 'em, an' I was on my way back, when you stopped me."

"And you were to deliver them to him at his office?"

Burns hesitated.

"No; not exactly. I wasn't to take 'em to his office, but to the little bunch o' trees on the river-bank, not fur from the Grizzly Bear Mine."

Quartz felt that his suspicion that Red Fee intended an immediate departure was correct.

"And did he tell you that he was going away?"

"Nothin' of the kind!"

"What is this money for?"

"Hanged if I can say, exactly; but I reckon he's sold out to the law sharp. That's how I sized it up, anyway."

"And I size it up that he means to leave, as soon as he gets these bills. You will have to go with us, Burns! We'll not rob you or hurt you. We'll give you a chance to deliver the money to him; and then we'll scoop him in and make him do some talking, or know why."

He gave the money and the letter back to Burns, but did not restore to him his horse. It was led by one of the men; while the others closed with their animals about its late rider to prevent an escape.

CHAPTER XIX.

PRISONERS TWO.

To return to Louise Norton, locked in her room. She gave way to a paroxysm of agonized grief, as she listened to Red Fee's retreating footsteps and thought of Tom Craigen imprisoned in the black mine. She could not know but that Red Fee meant to return to the mine to harm or abuse the prisoner, really fearing that was his intention. Tom's situation and danger oppressed her far more than her own.

She heard Red Fee stop in the corridor below and begin his restless pacing. Although this was a relief, as indicating that he did not intend to return directly to the mine, it also prevented her from making any outcry or attempting to escape.

Thomas's rapping at the door reached her, but, though she strained her ears to catch some words

of the conversation that ensued, it was in vain. There only floated to her a low droning, barren of significance.

The coming of Burns, the horseman, did not tend to relieve her anxiety. She felt that it portended some ill. When Burns rode away, she strove to catch a glimpse of him from the window that looked out on the street, but the darkness was too great. All she could tell was, that he was galloping in the direction of Rolling Stone.

How she longed for the return of Quintius Quartz, with the men he had gone to collect! She resolved that when he did come, she would in some manner succeed in attracting his attention, even if it was followed by condign punishment.

She hoisted the window-sash and leaned far out, hoping some one might pass near to whom she could whisper of the strait she was in. But the hour was too late and the place too isolated, to really expect any passers. Even the principal street was almost deserted, though she could yet see a few lights gleaming redly.

"Oh, if I only had a ladder or a rope!" was her mental wail.

The distance was too great for her to attempt to leap down; and, as she could see or hear nothing, and the night wind chilled her, she closed the window.

After a time she heard Curt Thomas tramp away; and hoped, even while she feared, that Red Fee might accompany or follow him. But Red Fee resumed his nervous pacing.

For many minutes the monotonous and heavy tread of his boots informed her that he was still in his office. Then she heard the door open and close, and his crunching steps on the walk.

A nervous tremor seized her. If he left the place, there might yet be a chance for her to escape in time to be of service to Tom Craigen. She waited until the sounds had died out; then began to count slowly so as to accurately measure the passing moments. They seemed so leaden-winged that she feared she might otherwise be too hasty in her movements. It would be fatal to her plans to make any outcry while Red Fee was still within hearing.

When she felt sure he had had time to place a sufficient distance between himself and the house, she began to shout to the servant-girl, and to stamp furiously on the floor.

The servant's room was just below her own.

"Oh, Betty!" she called, emphasizing the call with a vigorous thump from the heel of her boot. "Betty, are you asleep? Oh, Betty! Wake up, and come up here at once!"

Betty Butterball was a heavy sleeper, a thing well-known to Louise; and so she stamped and shouted with all her might, making enough noise, as she afterward declared, "to awaken the dead."

Finally her efforts seemed rewarded with success. She heard Betty's startled exclamations, and the thud of the girl's bare feet as they struck the floor.

"Come up here, Betty; and bring the hall-key with you. I'm locked in here."

There were hurried, rustling sounds in Betty's room; and soon after she appeared excitedly before Louise's door, bearing a lighted lamp.

"What in the world is the matter?" was her anxious inquiry.

"I'm locked in here, Betty! Did you bring the hall key? Father locked me in here, and took away the key!"

Betty gave a cry of astonishment and alarm, and in her agitation came near dropping the lamp.

"Oh, dear!" she wailed. "Locked you in! Whatever shall I do?"

"Go and get the hall key, if you haven't got it already. It will unlock this door. And be quick about it, for father may return at any time."

Betty seemed incapable of action; all she could do was to give utterance to exclamatory evidences of her surprise and alarm.

"Go and get the hall key!" Louise sharply commanded. "Don't you hear?"

Betty had a high regard for her mistress, but it was sometimes outweighed by her fear of Red Fee.

"Yes; I hear! But, Miss Louise, if he should catch me? Oh, dear me! Whatever shall I do?"

Louise's patience was rapidly becoming exhausted, when Betty at length turned to the stairway and descended to the corridor.

She was back very shortly.

"The key isn't there, Miss Louise!"

Louise understood why. Red Fee had feared something of the kind, and had taken it with him.

"Isn't there another key that will do?" Louise.

implored. "Or, can't you bend a wire and make it answer the purpose?"

"*The key is here!*"

Betty reeled against the wall, in an almost fainting condition, and Louise started as if a pistol-shot had rung out near her. It was the voice of Red Fee. He had returned unexpectedly and silently; and, hearing something of the talk, and from it understanding what was in progress, had removed his boots and crept quietly up the stairway.

"This is a fine business, now, ain't it?" sneeringly. "Who gave you any call, Betty, to bother with my affairs?"

Betty could only gasp.

"If you're wantin' to git in there so bad, I reckon I can help you!" with that same evil sneer.

Thereupon he applied a key to the lock; and, when the door swung open, took the lamp from the hands of the half-fainting servant, grasped her roughly by the shoulder, and pushed her into the room.

He chuckled satirically, as he closed and locked the door, and dropped the key into his pocket.

"You two can be company for each other. It'll keep ye from gittin' lonesome."

Louise leaped toward the door, pleading to be released.

"Oh, father!" she exclaimed; "how can you be so cruel?"

His voice softened a little, for he had always liked Louise.

"I don't mean to hurt ye, Lou!" addressing her by her pet name. "But you'll have to stay in there awhile. You can git out easy enough in the morning! You'll have to stay there, now; otherwise, you'll bu'st up all my plans. I'm a-goin' to leave hyer in a few minutes; and after I'm out of town, I don't care how soon some one comes."

"But surely, father, you will not hurt him?"

"Hurt who?"

"Tom Craigen. The man you have fastened up in the mine."

The answer was an oath; and without giving her any satisfaction on that point, he ran lightly down the stairway, resumed his boots, and was gone.

Louise's fear and excitement were now at fever heat. She had about lost all the respect and regard she ever had had for Red Fee, and his declaration that he intended to leave the country did not greatly touch her. Her anxiety for the safety of Tom Craigen amounted, however, to agony. Red Fee had not promised he would not injure the young man. His reply to her appeal had been an oath; and that was ominous.

"Why don't Mr. Quartz come?" she exclaimed, wringing her hands and hastening to the window. "Oh, if he would only come! I feel that something dreadful will happen if he delays much longer!"

The slowness of the assayer was inexplicable to Louise. She could not know of the many things that had occurred to consume his time.

"Let us shout together," she said to Betty. "Maybe that will draw help!"

She raised her voice in a wild cry; but, through fear, Betty remained silent.

There came no answering response.

Louise hoisted the sash and called again. She then listened anxiously. Far away she fancied she could hear the trampling of horses' feet; and she called again and again.

Then remembering that she had a little pistol in the room, she brought it forth, and fired shot after shot out of the window, till she emptied the chambers.

"Surely they will hear that!" she asserted, as she again hearkened to the far-away hoof-beats. "Oh, if they only get here in time!"

CHAPTER XX.

VINDICTIVE FEE.

A FEELING of bitter vindictiveness possessed Fee, as he made his way from the house in the direction of the mine. He was bitter against Curt Thomas—though not in the same measure as against Tom Craigen and his brothers; not because of any feeling that Thomas had injured him, but solely for the reason that he had been forced by circumstances to sell the mine to Thomas at such a ruinous price. Mixed with this was the impression that Thomas had not acted toward him in a generous manner when he accepted the mine at those figures, and that Thomas had really been pleased at the chance of such a bargain.

"We'll see how much good it'll do him!" he reflected, as he hurried on. "His one thousand

will grow to five, before he gets his mine in shape for work, *after I'm through with it!*"

He stopped as he heard, borne faintly to him, the frantic calls of Louise. For a moment he seemed about to turn back, and uttered savage oaths in a low tone. But he crowded down his rage, as his fancies turned toward the girl who was struggling to free herself from her prison. His kindly regard for Louise was the one good point in his thoroughly bad nature. It had not been sufficient to persuade him to let her go, to keep him from previous harsh treatment, nor to prevent him from deserting her forever at this critical time; but it did turn from her the fierce animosity that raged in his heart against every other person who had sought to cross his plans.

"Let her yowl!" a harsh, unmirthful laugh escaping him. "It won't hurt her, and I hope it won't hurt me. It's a good ways up to town; and, though she's got rather extra lungs, I don't think any one will hear her."

He started on again, hastening his footsteps, however, when the pistol-shots reached him, and the black look came back to his face.

"She may bring some one with that, and I'll have to hurry. If the gamblers hear that shootin', they'll think there's a lively fight goin' on, and they'll come a-bilin'!"

He still hoped, though, that the shots would not be heard.

His rapid, swinging strides took him to the mine without delay.

He had resolved upon a deed of desperation, which he went about as coolly as if it were only an ordinary affair of business.

Not far from the entrance was stored a quantity of blasting-powder. It had remained there since the opening of the mine, and its existence been almost forgotten, save by Red Fee. He knew its exact location and amount, and knew also that there were some fuses there.

A feeling of mad desperation took possession of him, as he approached the powder. The nearness of the contemplated deed and its victim, poured oil on the fire. If he could not strike Quintius Quartz in person, he would strike him through his brother. The death of Tom Craigen would give full measure of revenge, and to bring about Tom's death, in a horribly terrible way, was what brought Red Fee to the mine.

Not only would he avenge himself on Quintius Quartz, but by ruining the mine he would even the score between himself and Curt Thomas. It would be killing two birds with one stone.

"They don't know what kind of a man Red Fee is when he's driven to the wall!" growling out the words as he bent over the deadly explosive. "He never shows his teeth before he bites. There'll be some men hyer who'll have cause to remember me!"

He drew himself erect, as a new thought occurred to him.

"I wonder, now, if I couldn't lay fer Quartz and git a shot at him, after I blow this thing up?"

Many dangers would attend such an effort, as he realized when he began to think it over.

"One thing at a time!" he muttered, as he stooped again to the powder. "Tbis fu'st, and the other if I can. Maybe I can lay fer him, after I git that money from Burns. Then if I git a shot, let 'em ketch me if they can!"

He worked with much adroitness and skill, making several trips, and bearing a large quantity of the powder to the point selected. This was a cavity in the rock near Tom Craigen's prison-tunnel; and Red Fee could not doubt that the explosion of the powder at that place would tumble the overhanging rock into the tunnel and crush the prisoner.

He was careful to prevent the young man from hearing him; not that such a discovery could hinder the completion of the scheme, but because of a guilty and sneaking feeling.

As he worked, there came an ill-defined sound, and Red Fee sunk to the rocky floor with the silence of an Apache. The sound had not come from the tunnel, but from the main chamber of the cave. This was his first conclusion; but, as he lay there, he gradually worked himself into the belief that he had heard nothing at all, and had been misled by his nervous excitement. He was fearing interruption all the time, and this fear might engender the deception.

Nevertheless, he did not return to his task until he had made a quiet and stealthy search of the immediate vicinity. He found nothing; and as time was precious, he placed the powder in the cavity, weighted it to give the explosion greater force, and arranged a short-time fuse.

With nervous, shaking fingers, he lighted and applied a match to the fuse; then fled precipitately from the place, but so silently that his movements could scarcely have been heard. The sputtering fuse was located in an angle where it could be seen neither by Tom nor by any one looking from the entrance; and, thus hidden, there was not one chance in a thousand that it could fail to do its work.

Red Fee was shaking still, and a profuse perspiration bathed his body, as he made his way out into the star-gemmed night. There was no beauty in the stars, they seemed rather to look down on him like accusing eyes. He shuddered as he glanced back at the black entrance and thought of what was beyond it.

Then he turned in the direction of the little grove which he had selected as his place of meeting with Burns.

He was not destined to reach it, however, before the occurrence of the explosion.

Red Fee was not a practical miner, and in his fear of an interruption, he had cut the fuse shorter than he meant to, shorter than he thought; and, even as he looked backward, the ground shook with an uncertain tremulousness resembling the premonitory symptoms of an earthquake shock, and then there came a dull, rumbling roar that grew and grew in volume and intensity; and the very mountain seemed to rock and rend and crash into fragments.

Red Fee was buried from his feet; but he was uninjured; and, as soon as he could leap up, he turned his back on the scene of his dreadful crime, and with a sickening, sinking sensation, rushed wildly away.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHO WAS THE GHOST?

LOUISE held the smoking revolver in her hand, when she had emptied the last chamber, and strained her eyes through the night in an effort to catch a view of the distant horsemen. She could not be sure that the sounds came from Quartz's party; but if she could draw any one to her relief, time would be gained.

She greatly feared Red Fee would hear the shots and return to thwart the accomplishment of their purpose. But some risk had to be run. His coming back would be something, for it would delay his movements against Tom Craigen, if any such were contemplated.

She listened for his approaching footsteps on the pebbly walk; and when, after some moments, they were not to be heard, she turned her attention again to the clatter of the hoofs.

There could be no doubt that the horsemen were drawing nearer.

There were no more cartridges for her weapon or she would have used it again to hasten their movements, though she could tell that they were swinging forward at a goodly gait.

Five minutes later the tramp of hoofs was in the street, and the party halted in front of the house. She saw a man spring to the ground, and called loudly to him from the window.

It was Quintius Quartz. He was moving toward the office, but stopped to catch what she had to say.

"Shut up in there, eh? and Redmond gone!" in a voice betokening intense astonishment.

He did not wait to hear more, but shouted to one of his men and ran to the door.

Having no key to unlock it, he gave it a vigorous kick; and when the man joined him, they threw their combined weight against it.

By thus making battering-rams of their bodies they drove the door inward, following it so precipitately that they sprawled headlong on the floor.

It was now an easy matter to gain access to the corridor.

"I don't know that this is just the right thing to do!" Quartz exclaimed, as he bounded up the stairway. "It's a criminal offense to break in a man's doors that way, but I hope the circumstances will pardon it. At any rate we have the permission of his daughter who seems at present to have charge of the premises."

"Or ruther they have charge o' her!" the man wheezed, as he panted upward at Quartz's heels.

"You'll have to break in the door," called out Louise, when they arrived in front of her room; and forthwith a sturdy kick from the assayer's boot tore away the fastenings.

There was no light in the room, and no time was taken to get one. In hurried sentences Louise related what she knew concerning Tom's imprisonment.

The information stirred Quartz to great indignation, as well as to instant action.

"I'll have to go at once!" he declared; "but I'll come back in a little while and conduct you and this young lady to a place of safety."

He was bounding down the stairway two steps at a time before the sentence was completed.

He realized the need of haste. There was no certainty as to the intentions of Red Fee, but it was reasonable to conclude they were not friendly to Tom Craigen.

He ran for his horse, at the same time calling loudly to his men. He had not mounted, though, when the great explosion came.

A scene of wild terror ensued. The horses reared and plunged, being with difficulty restrained by their riders. Quartz's heart almost stilled its beating, so overcome was he by the fear that smote him. He knew that no blasts were being fired in the mine, and it seemed wholly unlikely that an accidental explosion could occur.

Shaking in every fiber, he climbed to the back of his horse; and as soon as the animal could be brought into control, he led his party at a swift gallop down the uneven slope.

They were rapidly approaching the mine, when a running figure attracted their attention. It was Red Fee, who was flying so wildly from the scene of his awful crime.

A suspicion that this flight was connected with the explosion came to Quartz, and he swerved in chase, his men plunging recklessly after him.

Red Fee had no chance in such a race. He dodged and twisted among the concealing boulders; then faced quickly about, driven to desperation, and fired point-blank at the foremost pursuer.

The rearing of his horse saved Quartz's life; though, even as it was, the bullet whistled within an inch of his head.

Before the desperate man could repeat the shot, Quartz knocked him down by a blow from a hurled revolver.

Even then, Fee would not surrender without a struggle. But it did not take long to reduce him to subjection. Quartz had no time to spend over his prisoner; and leaving him in charge of two men, he started with the others for the mine.

A bull's-eye lantern was produced by one of the party, and by its light they entered. Instantly they came upon evidences of the terrible wreck wrought by the explosives. Great fragments of rock had been torn loose and tossed in all directions. The powder smoke hung dense and stifling, making the light of the lantern red and faint.

Not far from the center of the cavern Quartz halted, with a gasp of horror. Before him lay the limp form of a man, whom at first glance he believed to be his brother.

With a cry of pain he dashed forward, kneeling at the stricken man's side. His followers hurried up with the lantern; and then Quartz discovered that the unfortunate was not Tom Craigen, but was, on the contrary, the mysterious being who had so long been playing the role of ghost. This was revealed by the blood-colored stains on the face.

With wondering exclamations, Quartz's party looked down at the unfortunate, and the query, "Who is he?" passed swiftly from lip to lip.

Before it could receive answer, their attention was drawn by faint calls. These came from Tom Craigen. Though the tones were weak, Quintius recognized his brother's voice and made immediate answer.

He seized the lantern from the hand of the man who held it, and rushed in the direction of the sounds.

"Where are you, Tom?" he shouted, holding the light above his head and looking over the scene of ruin before him.

"Here!" came the reply, from directly in front. "In this tunnel. I'm wedged in between some rocks, and can't help myself."

Sharply Quintius's call rang out for assistance, which was immediately given.

As soon as Tom's position could be correctly ascertained, the men began to remove the wreckage of boulders that lay between him and liberty. The timber-braces had been splintered and thrown to the further side of the cave, and only the big stones used by Red Fee to block the tunnel had saved him from death. The tunnel was really the least injured portion of the mine, because of the shielding thus given it.

Tom was found pinioned and helpless, but not much hurt. There were some bruises on his legs and hips, and when he was assisted to rise, he was dizzy and faint. However, this feeling passed quickly away, and he declared himself almost as good as new.

The meeting between the brothers was indeed a joyful one, though the outward manifestations of this joy were not excessive.

As soon as it was seen that Tom was safe, some of the men hurried back to the point where the unknown had been left. To their surprise they found he had returned to consciousness.

He was scarcely able to speak, and his words were so low and husky that his identity still remained a mystery. Not until they had borne him to the river and washed the red stains from his face, did they recognize him.

A simultaneous cry of astonishment arose.

He was Curt Thomas!

The bloody stains had been conferred by a reddish paint; and rudely-fashioned armor had protected him from Red Fee's bullets. One look into the white and drawn face showed that he was not long for this world; a fact he fully realized.

"I'm dyin', boys!" he hoarsely whispered. "Carry me somewhere an' make me easy. I've a little talkin' to do, an' I hain't long to do it in!"

Red Fee had been brought up by this time, and his surprise at discovering who the ghost really was was as great as that of any one there. He had never suspected Curt Thomas.

The sorely-wounded man was lifted tenderly and borne up the long slope to Red Fee's residence. The carriers had scarcely started with their burden, when Louise Norton and Betty Butterball were encountered. Their anxiety had driven them forth.

Thomas asked for stimulants when the house was reached. He was very weak, and failing fast. His story, told as soon as he was able to speak, was listened to with marked attention.

He had undertaken the role of ghost with a purpose. That purpose was to prevent the working of the mine, and to so depreciate it in value that he could buy Red Fee's interest for a mere trifle. How well he succeeded—aided, of course, by the counter boom at Rolling Stone—the reader has seen.

He had climbed into the room over Craigen's Rolling Stone office, immediately preceding the fire, for the purpose of obtaining possession of some papers which he believed would incriminate him—a hint that Craigen had got bold of such papers having reached him. And his last visit to the mine, the one which had brought about his death, had been to release Tom Craigen. Now that the mine was his, he did not wish the young man to be held there. He had disguised himself with the red paint, not desiring that his agency in the matter should become known, especially to Red Fee.

The confession contained something else, and that was an avowal of how he and Fee had gained the Grizzly Bear Mine. To most of those present this revelation was very unexpected. It involved the revelation that Quintius Quartz and Philip Craigen were one and the same.

"I've wronged you, pard—wronged you bitter!" the dying man confessed. "I can't undo it, but I'll rest easier, an' mebbe have a better show up yander, if I try. I never had any right to the mine, ner had Red Fee; but I bought his interest in it to-night. An' now I want to turn it all over to you, if a feller can turn over anything which he don't own, an' which is yours already!"

A look of peace came to his face as he caught Craigen's generous words of reply. He had tried to make reparation, and his death was the calmer for it.

Red Fee degenerated into a whimpering coward, when he heard this confession and saw how completely he was in the toils.

A month afterward he was tried for the murder of Curt Thomas. This trial consumed the thousands he had recently obtained; and, though his worthless life was spared, it was scarcely a favor, for he was condemned to spend the remainder of it in prison and at hard labor.

At Philip Craigen's earnest solicitation the railway was pushed from Rolling Stone on to Lucky Ledge; and the prosperity that came to the united towns was phenomenal. Of course, the Craigens shared in this prosperity; and the reopening of the Grizzly Bear Mine was made memorable by the marriage of Thomas Craigen to Louise Norton, and by a ball that far eclipsed the masquerade.

THE END.

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